

14/6/1992

Introduction

From the earliest known draft of 'The Streetfire Cabaret'

They say that music is "The Universal Language" and I've had first hand experience to prove that it's true. The most magical moment I think I ever experienced occurred out on the streets one cold and blustering kings cross night while my busking companions and I were performing a Bob Dylan classic for the crowd. I was surrounded by people young and old from all walks of life and a number of different nationalities. All in attendance were singing along to the chorus of 'Blowing in the wind' when out of the night a spirit lifting wave of tribal unity descended upon our gathering. For a fleeting moment it felt like I was at a new age love festival. In the years that followed I was host to a number of similar events which got me thinking 'The Human Family' might not be such an absurd notion after all'. As I lived the role of a free roaming mistral I drew a wealth of inspiration from life on the open road and I was equally enchanted by the carnival atmosphere that pervades the red light districts of large cities. My thrill a minute streetlife existence gave rise to a bounty of singalong ditties which are the musical record of our adventures along the 'Busking trail'. Some of the most potent songs in our repertoire have bold and unmistakable environmental themes which were inspired by regular excursions to the frontline. As I comprehended the magnitude of the global ecology crisis I knew that I had stumbled upon one of the ultimate cosmic truths which is the fact that all living creatures depend on the earth to survive. After I perceived this simple yet profound revelation I made it my life's mission to promote sustainability to the lingering street level masses whenever I performed. Large crowds of seemingly ordinary folk have cheered me on as I delivered passion filled sermons on the destructive plunder of the worlds ecology systems. I like to believe that all who applaud my songs of protest, hope and solution are decent, down to earth folk who relate through a common, collective survival instinct. Every coin that ever landed in the guitar case tells me that I am not alone in my thoughts and feelings. There are 'others' who hold grave concerns about the plight of humanity. There are 'others' who sense danger on this unsustainable hi-tech path we are racing along in our search for the future.

These, ... 'other people' are you, ... and you are, ... 'These of my kind'.

Among the daily routine of public performance I was always too busy working on the next applause to get to know anyone too closely. You my audience were a fast moving sea of faces who stopped for a while, threw some coins perhaps and then continued on your way through the noise and the bustle of the street. I didn't get to know you and you didn't really get to know me. For those who have been a part of our busking shows and for those who have not I will gladly share my tale. May peace and good fortune come to all who have entered, ...

'The Sacred Realm of the Busking Circle'

Steven Tripp.

15/11/2021

THE CAPTAINS LOG CONTINUUM



CHAPTER ONE

BEING WHERE?, ... WHEN?

'AHoy! THERE ! MY MOTLEY CREW!', IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE,...

'Rock and Rolled!'



AND IT'S BEEN JUST AS LONG SINCE I ADDED ANY NEW ENTRIES TO THIS OLD SALTS FRAYED AND TATTERED BOOK OF LOGS. A LOT HAS HAPPENED BETWEEN THEN AND NOW SO IT'S HIGH TIME I GAVE YOU AN UPDATE ON HOW I'M SAILING IN THESE ROUGH AND TUMBLE DAYS OF THE PRESENT , ...



'Right Here!, ... Right Now!'



IN THE SILLY SEASON LEAD UP TO,...



Christmas! AND THE, ... NEW YEAR!



OF, ... 2022!



NOTHING!

I was sitting high on a mountain pondering what possible thoughts or ideas could qualify as the pinnacle intellectual achievements of an evolved consciousness. Not only human but all complex forms of life everywhere in the infinite cosmos. In the exhilaration of the moment it occurred to me that it just may be the ability to truly comprehend and visualise the sheer magnitude of ones own existence. Take homo-sapiens for example. In our physical make up we are for the most part water molecules and dust particles left over from the birth of the cosmos. We exist on a life supporting orb in numbers approaching ten billion and our cosmic home is a mere speck in an omniverse which extends to infinity in all directions. That in itself should be enough to stop any individual member of our species dead in their tracks and make them perceive their existence with a renewed sense of wonder and awe. Surely the act of comprehending in it's entirety the scale and dimensions of the physical cosmology with your own existence in it's appropriate place in the big picture, would have to be the unbeatable pinnacle of intellectual achievements that any evolved being could reach. I mean what in the world could possibly top that?

Nothing! is what.

So what do you imagine would happen if we threw on our jet packs and dived into the nothingness before us? Pick a direction, any direction at all and there you go ... *Lift off!*

So over this way we have 'Zilch!'. ... Over that way 'Zero!'. And directly ahead of us for unfathomable Squillions of cosmos sized infinities, ... **'Sweet fuck all!'**

Ok! so there's not much out here to see folks. What say we fire up our jet packs and get back to that conceptual high point we lifted off from? Hey! wait a minute Look down there, a whole bunch of people are jumping off the pinnacle with jet packs on. There must be a party or something going on out here. Nah just a second. They're all shaking their heads in disbelief the same as us. I think we may have reached the end of the road when it comes to wild, unbridled imaginings about this odd phenomena we call creation. Now it's time for some snippets of a persons life somewhere amongst the imperceptible miasma and total everythingness of it all, so buckle up your straps my young space travellers and join me on a bumpy old ride through all of the stuff I've thus far managed to squeeze into one lifetime.



So! Wadda! Ya! Want first sports fans? Ok the good news is, I was emptying the dusty old bag from out of the vacuum cleaner this morning and low and behold I finally found that quarter ounce of top shelf weed that vanished into thin air on me about a fortnight ago.

Good eh? Mmmm!



So here's the other news, coming at ya! Live from planet earth in the twenty first century, we have recently found ourselves in the grip a system crippling, global pandemic known as the '**COVID 19**' virus which has rapidly encompassed our cosmic home and in Australia we are just now experiencing an easing of restrictions and border closures after many long months of total lockdown. At the peak of the most recent variant flare up known as the 'Delta strain' the nationwide lockdown included a night time curfew and the mandatory wearing of masks even in the outdoors. After countless deaths worldwide a vaccine has finally been developed for public distribution and the horrible statistics are beginning to go down around the globe.

To coincide with the mandatory vaccinations sometimes violent 'Antivax' protests and demonstrations have been taking place in many countries. As far as I can see much of the reason for the protests is conspiracy theory bullshit like "There are micro computers in the vaccine and the dark state cartels who control our governments are going to use secret communications technology like 5g to control us" or "The plague is a hoax initiated by alien vampires disguised as humans who are going to attack us all in our homes during lockdown and extract our blood for their offspring." An almost comical detail to arise from the pandemic was the fact that as supermarkets around the world were being hit by panic buying raids and checkout area punchups the humble roll of toilet paper was to become the most treasured item to stock up on. I deducted from this intriguing detail that most people would rather go without food than have to wipe their bum with old newspapers or leaves from out of the garden if all the of taps ran dry in the crisis. In younger days I used to be such an optimist that all thoughts of impending doom were simply shrugged off and ignored. These days wherever possible I try to be a well informed realist as I cautiously tread my path in the world. I strongly suspect that this pandemic is just a warning punch by the forces of nature and what is to come may see the absolute collapse of our civilizations in my own lifetime. When the crunch comes my exit strategy is a stockpile of sleeping pills and other assorted opiates and I've got enough stashed away to throw a, ...



'Kiss The World Goodbye Party!' for all my friends.

My water bound camping adventures and increasingly rare busking shows were halted abruptly around 2015 when I made the critical mistake of leaving my flat, coastal, boating and pushbike friendly stomping ground for a fifty dollar a week rented caravan in the hinterland up behind Mullumbimby. It would seem I had been playing cat and mouse with the local council rangers for way too long and all of my illegal camping ground options on the Brunswick river were used up. They had started leaving friendly little notices pinned to the entrance of my tent advising me that I would be issued with a \$2000 fine unless I vacated the location immediately. Winter had set in on the Northern Rivers and within three days of struggling with the cold, wet and slippery slopes up in the hills I went down with a bout of sciatica that rendered me virtually bed ridden for more than two months. Any attempts to seek specialist help meant at the very least a two day bus and camping trip to the Gold coast or Newport across the Queensland border, which I was not in a fit state to do. A plan to return to Sydney by train became my best option with my primary mission to seek out much needed specialist attention. All drugged up on Endone and Lyrica tablets and getting around on a walking stick I paid a guy from the local soup kitchen a hundred bucks to drive me and my load in his ute to the nearest railway station which was in Grafton. Once there I abandoned my rusty old pushbike and wrestled my loaded up golf buggy come bike trailer onto the train. After a bloody painful and uncomfortable overnight journey I arrived in old Sydney town and immediately stashed all of my belongings under some bushes in the carpark area out the front of Central station. Still half asleep and stiff as a board I hailed a passing cab and traversed the short distance to the kmart store on Broadway where I purchased a brand new el cheapo treadly. I set up a camp in the homeless peoples settlement on the public reserve across from central which was for the most part ignored by the authorities. After a few days I rolled my load mostly downhill to Circular quay from Central station. I boarded a Manly ferry and set up a more permanent camp in one of my old habitats among some shrubs and trees near the Queenscliff lagoon. Once this was achieved I was ready to start searching for some medical and social welfare help in this more 'poor person friendly' environment.

After more than three decades away I made a return visit to the Manly community centre which had remained exactly the same as I remembered it other than a splash of paint and the installation of some more modern technology. The friendly and very helpful, hippied out guy that interviewed me lent a sympathetic ear and within a week I was appointed a nice lady, case manager called Lynsey from Scotland. Lynsey hooked me up with a host of local free services including a GP and a sciatica specialist that I could access through my free public health entitlements. As well as this she got me onto the emergency waiting list for public housing. One awful, bleak, spring morning I was camping in a one man tent at the mouth of the Narrabeen lakes when around 3.00am it started to hail, rain and thunder, then an almighty gust flattened the tent around me so it became just like an extra blanket over my swag.

I rolled up a hefty scoob and just sat out the blow until daybreak where I was able to brew a coffee on my small butane cooker. As I was packing up my camping gear around 9.00am the mobile phone rang and it was Lynsey. She said that I had been "offered a unit in Brookvale and when would I be available to do an inspection?" On hearing this great news I was bursting at the seams with a sudden rush of excitement and relief. I said "it's a dry shelter just tell them I'll take it wherever it is". Still about to explode with enthusiasm I pulled up in the carpark out the front of the Woolworths store directly opposite the lake. I watched out for any empty utes in or entering the carpark and spoke with a few drivers but to no avail. Then after about half an hour of trying I scored a ride with a plumber who was driving past Brookvale and he said that he would be happy to take me. We exchanged fishing stories along the way and he refused to take a red cent for his troubles.

I have been a mobility scooter enthusiast and a bonified home dweller for about six years now doing all the normal stuff like checking the letter box, paying the electricity bills and calling the plumber if the toilet gets blocked. Sometimes I still shake my head and chuckle with delight just doing simple things like going to the fridge for a coldy or turning on an electric light. Much like Tom Hanks I guess on his return to civilization in the 'Castaway' movie. Amid my travels in the past I had made enquiries about public housing and I was informed that the waiting list can be up to twenty years for a single male, plus my dog was a problem. On hearing this I didn't even bother to fill out the forms. I always imagined that I would draw my last breath camping out among the dunes and mangroves and my skeleton would probably be stripped bare by crabs, ravens and seagulls. Yet here I am with my anchor well and truly dropped on the northern beaches of Sydney the place I first decided was my favourite as I passed through from Adelaide in my van so many years ago. It's a good job I'm here in a safe place because as well as my lower back and sciatica problems I have been developing warning signs that something is not right with my on board computer. The reason my busking shows had started becoming so few and far between was the onset of peculiarities in my speech and in time in my singing as well. What started as a slight slurring of the words has now become a real struggle to articulate any words at all. Any attempt to sing soon turns to a need to give up and then depression sets in. I am yet to receive a conclusive diagnosis from the neurologist I have been going to see. The best he can offer as he examines my brain scans is "A light scaring of the cerebral cortex which may have been caused by a mild stroke or the use of marijuana and alcohol". "Thanks a million doc!". I thought I was living in the future of modern medicine where pretty much all physical conditions have been given a name and here I am after four long years still yet to receive a comprehensive diagnosis of this thing I am living with. The mild stroke theory I can go along with but "You smoke too much weed or you drink too much booze" is just a professional cop out in my books and it's just another cause of frustration with the ways of the world.

In attempts to identify possible causes of the affliction myself I have stopped drinking fluoridated water and I'm no longer buying potentially toxic seafood from the fish market. I'm also paying much closer attention to all the possible dementure causing products on the supermarket shelves. All sorts of weird shit is occurring in my neuro-physiological reality that I'm pretty certain is connected with this mystery condition. My seriously dwindling eyesight on the laptop is of concern and the inconsistent patterns of my speech impairments is another. It's the things like wondering why I went into the kitchen or the laundry that are of the most concern, so who knows you might get to experience my decline into senility as you absorb the final chapters of my life. I'm getting the gut feeling that it might to be a race against time to get my work in a publishable form before I get the bad news from the doctor about recent blood test results. If I kick the bucket mid sentence it will probably be a fitting end for one such as I who is self absorbed to the point of vanity and often blind to the achievements of others. I've always said that it should be mandatory for everyone at the age of thirty five to write an account of their life and times since birth. Prior to the creation of a journal such as this the world is an elusive bitch of a thing that you can't really define in words or put your finger on. A page by page record of your time on the earth makes it tangible at all levels from the opened book on your lap right down to the atoms and molecules in the ink.

A while back I was granted membership to the National Disability Insurance Scheme which brought with it an annual budget of about one hundred and eighteen thousand dollars to be used on all the things I need to get by in the world. The funding plan I was originally given was only worth sixty eight grand but a stroke of good luck came my way to change things dramatically. Bored with hanging around the unit on a Saturday night in the spring I was out and about on the scooter wetting a line off the warf in Manly. A young middle eastern looking guy and his girlfriend were standing nearby throwing hamburger scraps down to the fish and wouldn't you know it I got a captains salute. He said "I hope you don't think I'm rude mate but I reckon it's pretty amazing that someone in your condition is out fishing at night time". Quick as a flash I said "Waddaya! Mean my condition? I'm the disabled Superman". After the chuckling had subsided he got down to the business of enquiring what services my current healthcare providers are arranging for me. On my reply of "Sweet fuck all" he was quick to let me know that he works for a provider out in the western suburbs and if we could meet up in the new week it would definitely be worth my while. On the following Wednesday I listened intently to his shpeel and then I signed up on his eagerly produced tablet. By the Friday of that week my badly neglected unit was being attacked by a three person, deep clean crew who made my grubby little home spotless. From then on the cleaners became regular visitors along with weekly podiatry and deep massage therapists and let's not forget Imran my full time personal carer and driver.

When I first filled out the NDIS questionnaire in the company of my case manager I paid special attention to a section that dealt with any 'life goals' I may have. It wanted to know if there was anything i might like to achieve with the financial support that was available to me. The very first thing that sprung to mind was to digitally re-record all of the old analogue tracks I composed back in the nineteen eighties and nineties. Around that time I compiled three albums worth of scratchy demo recordings containing songs about my life on the road as a busker and there's one album that's chock a block with protest songs that are as relevant now as they were back then. I have started acquiring the necessary recording equipment for the job and I've converted my spare room into a fully functioning studio. I placed ads on social media in attempts to attract a musical partner who knew what they were doing and the first muso I hired was pretty talented but his musical tastes were way too obscure for what I needed. In any case after just two months he ended up taking another job in video production. The second guy I hired is a bloke called 'Dale Ryan' who was in a reasonably successful eighties band called 'Outline'. Throughout the pandemic we have maintained a mostly on line collaboration and he just keeps popping out fantastic new music beds one after another with great new arrangements. He's laid down vocal tracks on a couple of the songs but our long term plan is to bring in a variety of hot young singers to give new life to the material.

So the first drafts of the book I started writing long ago about my fly by night existence became so messy with new inclusions and big fat deletes of text that I completely lost the thread of what I was banging on about. Being 'more thought than I stoned I was' most of the time, the idea of trying to pick up where I had left off was just way to daunting a notion to even contemplate. As well as that I was still able bodied enough to be living through the sort of adventures that a person might want to stick in their memoirs. A few years passed by and eventually I put my thinking cap back on, rolled up my sleeves (and a big fat scoobie) and dived back into it with a renewed enthusiasm. With these new pages I've started scribbling my plan is to insert excerpts from those early chapters and this will allow me to describe past events as I write of my experience in the present day. I will no doubt come to a point where I am completely up to date with my current reality, so each new chapter I include thereafter will just have short, present day introductions. Song lyrics and poems are included where applicable and I trust you can groove with all of the fonting around and clip art decorations, it's my new hobby. To those artistically inclined such as I it just seems like such a shame wasting all of that beautiful blank space.

CHAPTER ONE FROM, .. *'The Streetfire Cabaret'*

BEING THERE THEN



I made my grand entrance into the world on the ninth day of August in 1957. Around the same time as my arrival on this planet, the Russian satellite 'Sputnik' completed a history making orbit of the earth and in my books that represents a suitably action packed welcome to the rat race. The delivery room of the Port Adelaide Public Hospital was the setting for my opening performance and as it happened my screaming debut into life was a double act.



LESLEY AND I AS WHIPPER SNAPPERS

I commenced this earthly incarnation as the Yang side of male and female twins who were cursed with the added distinction of being born illegitimate. Back in the Nineteen Fifties births that happened out of wedlock were seen as shameful events and they were mostly frowned upon by the wider community. My twin sisters name is Lesley and we are about as different as the proverbial cheese and chalk. She is mostly introverted and docile like a spring lamb, while I am a raging extrovert lion with a restless and irrepressible spirit.

When I was a very young child at the Salisbury North Infant School I got my first glimpse of the rewards that can come from being a talented young exhibitionist. In art classes one day the teacher introduced our group to the wonders of plasticine. Like all of the other kids I set about mashing the colours together into a mostly grey, streaky blob, but unlike the rest I had a specific reason for doing so. I kept a ball of the white plasticine separate from the grey stuff to be used on the finishing touches. By rolling chunks of the grey mass into balls and individual lengths I moulded a majestic bull elephant in full charge with a raised trunk and large flapping ears. I also made an eagle with outstretched cotton wool wings which resembled one of those American eagle paperweights you see. The ball of white plasticine I had kept aside was used to construct the beak of the eagle and his pointed talons, along with the tusks of the elephant and his intricately sculpted toenails. The class teacher noticed that my childish creations were a little too advanced for someone of such a tender age and she promptly notified the Headmistress of my achievement. All of a sudden I was the centre of everyone's attention and the South Australian Department of Education were summoned to our school where I was given a special IQ test. I was later presented with a photograph of the models and on the back of the snapshot the Headmistress had included a friendly little note.

Dear Steven.

Here's the photograph that I promised you. Your outstanding works of art will remain on the mantelpiece of our staff room for as long as I am the Headmistress of this school.

We are so proud of you.

Mrs. Wilkinson.



MY PLASTICINE MODELS

What an amazing blast of encouragement for one so young. From that day on it didn't matter how much anyone tried to defame me because I had been told by life that I was special and important. That childhood experience triggered my artistic awakening and it has driven my creative evolution ever since. I haven't yet mentioned that I also have an older half brother by the name of Dudley or 'The Dud' as I prefer to remember him. He was the result of a short and unhappy marriage which ended in divorce before I was born. This poor talentless dullard made my life miserable from the word go because I was confident, creative and popular while he was maladjusted, ugly and downright mean. Throughout my childhood years and well into the teens I had to contend with his malicious bullying. He was my first real enemy in this life but I should be grateful as he provided an early warning for the tall poppy clippers I would encounter a little further down the track.



One of the most memorable men friends my single mother had was a guy called Sam. He was the pick of the bunch as far as I was concerned because he was so big and powerful. And to top things off he was a Fireman. Like any impressionable kid I would say, "When I grow up I want to be a fireman, just like you Sam". My favourite show as a kid was Superman and Sam fit the bill perfectly. Built like a footy player he was everything a man is supposed to be to an eight year old, daddyless kid. Sam straightened his broad, muscular shoulders in a true 'Superman-ish' way and he delivered advice worthy of any passing father figure. "Stevie, when you grow up, don't aim to be a Fireman, ... You aim to be the Fire Chief". I think that juicy little snippet of information was the most eye opening revelation to come my way during the entirety of my childhood years. It's a bit like saying, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp". It's also very similar to the high and aspiring concepts behind one of my favourite songs 'The Impossible Dream'. If my dysfunctional family environment was anything to go by I had to conclude that human beings can be a bloody unevolved and dangerous breed. After Sam's well intended advice I guess I decided that the best way to get on in this world is to become, ...

'THE KING OF THE BASTARDS'

I fell in with the so called 'wrong crowd' very early in the game and if the truth were known I was pretty much the ring leader. Everything from wagging school to shoplifting were right up my ally but my adolescent crime spree came to a sudden end at age thirteen when I got busted with a bunch of my school mates for nicking a car. The three year bond I was placed on provided the first real glimpse of where I was heading in life and that was to prison where all the other guys eventually landed. I guess I was luckier than most of them because I had my creative talents to rely on which offered far safer options than crime ever could, if I was smart enough see it.

There was a group of hippies living directly across the street from us and the goings on around their colourful den offered the most interest in my narrowly defined, home incarcerated world. From a well worn position on the front step I could take in their stoned antics and the thing that most attracted my attention was the ever present guitar music that filled the air. Lee Turner was a twenty one year old, self confessed alcoholic and a chronic pot smoker. He looked like a classic 'Furry Freak' adorned with an afro-mass of blazing red hair. It was always tied back with a red bandanna and he wore paisley patches on his tattered jeans. Embroidered waistcoats from far off exotic lands were his trademark garment and they probably never saw the inside of a washing machine. Lee got immense pleasure from just strumming his splintery old guitar on the front veranda of their house. He played along to the radio music that filtered through from his bedroom and over time he had built a repertoire of the most popular anthems of the day.



The stripped and rusting shell of a long abandoned volkswagon combi van adorned his pokey little front yard and someone had decorated the crumbling wreck with painted flowers and sixty's slogans like, 'Peace Man', 'Groovy' and 'Far Out'. Lee circled the wreck lost in concentration as he struggled to finger the chords and once he had mastered the music of a tune he would start to sing along in a husky, but well controlled way. I got to watch him going through the whole process of learning a new song and it provided my first introduction to a creative process that I would later embrace myself. Quite often there would be other guitarists around and Lee would teach them the songs he had learned. The other players picked up the chord patterns in no time at all then sweet vocal harmonies would encircle Lee's powerful, masculine voice. Invariably the hippy musicians would lubricate their practice sessions with Coopers Ale and Christ knows what else until it became an out of it cacophony of laughing jumping gnomes. My mother used to say if she ever caught me associating with those, "No good hippy bludgers across the road" she would "Thrash me to within an inch of my life". The fun loving ways of our peacenik neighbours offered a tantalizing glimpse of freedom and I knew that I had to get closer to the action for a better look. I had by now turned sixteen and the end of my probation period was just around the corner. At the risk of breaking my good behaviour bond and landing in some bloody horrible reform school I started to push the boundaries of my confinement. If there were lights on over at the hippy den late in the night I would pop across the road to see what they were up to. As I poked my head in through the bead curtains of their front door I'd often find Lee and his friends sitting around on bean bags playing their guitars and singing. Psychedelic album covers were spread out all over the lounge room floor and there was only ever enough room for me to hang in the kitchen doorway. The walls were decorated with psychedelic posters and the smell of incense filled the room.

The record the hippies played along with most often was 'The Woodstock Album' and it was so badly thrashed there was hardly an unscratched groove left on it. 'Freedom' by Richie Havens was their favourite track and it was the one that Lee used to sing the best. I identified strongly with that particular chant to liberty and he bellowed it out with all the conviction of a tortured slave, ...

' SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD,

OH! SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD'

'AND I'M A LONG ... LONG LONG WAY FROM HOME.'

'FREEDOM ! FREEDOM ! FREEDOM ! ... OH! FREEDOM ! '

'FREEDOM ! FREEDOM!, FREEDOM!, ... YEAH ! FREEDOM ! '

RICHIE HAVENS.



I only ever had time to hear one or two of their songs before I had to go scampering back home but that was more than enough to justify the risk. I would often smile myself to sleep and dream of the day I could dress like the hippy musicians and sing to my hearts content. Lee and his friends were the best thing that could have happened while I was living through such bleak and restrictive times and their late night jam sessions offered a peek into a lifestyle that would later become my own. There's a laughable irony to the whole story which casts my mother as an unintentional saviour. By trying to keep me away from the ungodly influence of the hippies she unknowingly pointed the way to a life of close association with music and the counter-culture, ... Gee thanks Ma!



'THE SPIRIT OF THE SIXTIES'

***I woke up on a couch from a, drugged out slumber, having fallen at the party from a broken chair
with a singed mustache from too much smoke and sprinkles of glitter on my face and hair.***

***I scooped up a mug of warm chai tea, as I wiped away the sleep from my dreary eyes
then I peeked out of the window through the morning haze,
at the uniformed workers passing by.***

***There were others waking up on the living room floor,
to the aroma of the tea and the noise of the street
bouncing balloons and colorful streamers, in a tangle of arms and legs and feet.***

Chorus:

***It's the spirit of the sixties with me everywhere I go,
the magic of the moment with all the people that I know
We sing and dance like children in the splendor of our days
And we ain't afraid of no lurking, monsters, ... down in the purple haze.***

***Alan Ginsberg and Baba Ram Das were the first to emerge to greet the day
they were followed by Jimi saying, where's my guitar?,
as the radio came on and Woodstock played.
Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead
started jamming in the kitchen to that much loved tune
as people crowded in for their cups of chai, from the outside balcony and other rooms.
Hugs and kisses were shared with love, in the rush do whatever needs to be done
as luxury saloons cruised off up the street into the psychedelic glare of the rising sun.***



Chorus:

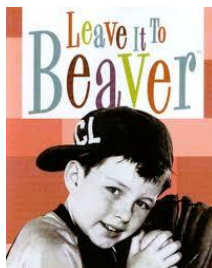
***It's the spirit of the sixties with me everywhere I go,
the magic of the moment with all the people that I know
We sing and dance like children in the splendor of our days
And we ain't afraid of no lurking, monsters, ... down in the purple haze.***

***As the last of the stragglers departed the scene,
the cleaners arrived to attend to their chores***

***Elvis and Marylyn in their work overalls and Abbott and Costello came to mop the floors.
Big Herman Munster emptied overflowing bins, when Gilligan arrived in a dumpster truck
among the empty bottles not a drop remained, as young beaver found he was not in luck.
Dennis the menace found a half smoked reefer, in a pouch of tobacco on the garden wall
so as the workers left and the doors were locked they lit up the joint and smoked it all.***

Chorus:

***It's the spirit of the sixties with me everywhere I go,
the magic of the moment with all the people that I know
We sing and dance like children in the splendor of our days
and we ain't afraid of no lurking, monsters, ... down in the purple haze.***



Through her dealings with the local welfare agencies the old girl came in contact with a most agreeable fellow called Tom Wright who was the State President of a charity organisation known as 'Birthright'. Mr Wright came around to interview her for some additional family support which was to be provided by his organisation. After she had told him about my trouble with the law some early pencil drawings were pulled out from under my bed. Mr Wright was very impressed by what he saw and he offered to sponsor me for junior art classes in a kind gesture that was separate to the family support. The special treatment I received from Mr. Right really got on Dudley's goat and my doses of big brotherly intimidation were increased henceforth. Not only did that wonderful old bloke pay for my artistic tuition out of his own pocket, but he used to personally pick me up each week and take me to the art classes. The art tuition was held in a run down, two storey weatherboard shack which had my favourite peppercorn tree growing out the front. Mr. Right listened receptively to my dreams of musical stardom and he made sure we always arrived earlier than the others so I could sit in the upper branches of my tree practicing the songs I was learning from the hippies.

The Art Teacher was a wonderful old eccentric by the name of Rose Hadland and she was a personal friend of Tom. I soon found out that his passion was landscape painting and as it happened he took classes under Rose as well. Each week when he picked me up after art classes he would praise my work and get truly excited as he did. I had seen some of his paintings in the hallway of the studio and in my opinion they were a plain and lifeless waste of canvas. I never told him that because he was so encouraging and it might have put an end to my weekly escape from home. My first ever attempt at painting with oils was an Aboriginal tribesman that I copied from the National Geographic. Tom was astounded by the accuracy of his skin tone and the shading that I had applied. As we sat in his car out the front of my house he said if I stuck at it one day I would make a "Fine Artist".



MY BLACK FELLA PAINTING

The Elizabeth Town Centre shopping complex was an important part of my teenage experience. It's home to the Octagon Theatre at which I saw Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs playing in the first live venue I ever attended. The first thing I ever shoplifted came from the centre shops and it was a 45 single of the Beatles singing, 'Roll over Beethoven'. I used to hang around that shopping centre whenever I wagged school and it was the first place I ever kissed a girl.

The main entrance to the shopping complex was marked by a large fountain which was a regular meeting place for the gang before we got busted. To the left of the fountain and to the right there were stairs leading into the upper levels and these were also key locations for our loitering pastimes. At the top of the stairs on the left was a smoky poolroom which was often the scene of violent youth clashes. On the other side of the dual staircases there was a ballroom dancing club where the better behaved kids could be found on the weekends. The dancing instructor was a funny old party boy known as Charlie Bannister and he was also a member of my mother's single parents club. Among his weekly dance club activities Charlie used to hold special classes for the kids of the single parents. After my trouble with the law I was enrolled in his classes as part of the campaign to make me a fine upstanding young citizen.

The ballroom dancing classes were held on Friday nights and they were to become a much treasured escape from the home front. They offered the closest thing to adult life I had sampled to date and I was partnered on the dance floor by some very attractive fourteen to sixteen year olds. As well as the more traditional dances we learned I was also taught the fox trot, the tango and the quick step to fifty's classics like, 'Rock Around The Clock', 'Hound dog' and, 'The Twist'. When first I started ballroom dancing I was an undersized little twerp who was only invited to dance when they were low on numbers. Within twelve months of my first lesson I shot up in height by about a foot and a half and then all of a sudden the girls were making googly eyes at me from across the room. Giggling and squirming they would scheme to get me on the dance floor and this is where I first learned how to play hard to get. I was a bloody good dancer and those sturdy Hungarian genes had started to surface in my adolescent looks and physique. In the time slot that was allocated to rock and roll Elvis Presley would invariably come blasting out of the speakers and I used to mimic the gyrating hip movements of our hero from under a dancefloor lights. Sweating teenybopper girls would break free of their partners and form a circle around me as I showed them how it was done to 'Jailhouse Rock' or 'Hound dog'. They would clap me on with a fierce, untamed passion and Charlie would always let me continue until I had finished my latest new dance routine. He often said I could be the next Gene Kelly if I stayed away from those troublemakers in the pool hall.



During my Court Ballroom days I got the first indication that I might have what it takes to become famous. They used to hold regular talent contests as part of the end of year festivities and I signed myself in to do a spot. The only real competition I had to contend with was a girl called Norma Henry who sang an ever so sweet version of 'Over the Rainbow' and other favourites like it. She always got the judges squirming with delight and handing out high scores but that was mainly because she was so bloody cute and adorable. My turn came around a couple of acts after Norma and I hit them with the most sincere version of 'Something' by 'The Beatles' I could come out with. As luck would have it they called it a draw for first place and I sang a duet of 'Bridge over Troubled Waters' with Norma to close the show. Our dance classes came to an end for the year as 'The Last Waltz' by Engelbert Humperdink echoed out from the ballroom. As was his way Charlie turned a blind eye to the love tinkering teenagers who were smooching on the outside balcony overlooking the town centre. Norma and I were among them and we kissed like invincible celluloid heroes until the final note of the song said it was time to go home.

'I fell in love with you, ... The last waltz should last forever'



CHAPTER TWO

MY RIGHT TO BE ANGRY



MAYDAY! MAYDAY! ICEBURG ON THE STARBOARD BOW!

MAYDAY! THIS IS TITANIC! MAYDAY!

Ahoy! So the unfolding events of my pre-Christmas experience are such that I am dedicating the whole next chapter to them and in doing so I will endeavour to get a mountain of unwanted sea ice off my chest. If you are easily offended by bad language then read no further and while you're at it go and turn off the fucking TV you ignorant little snowflake fuck! Why don't you just neck yourself or migrate to another planet. Get on the page dick wit. Your toddlers learned how to say 'cunt' before they could even speak. Remember when you and the little lady dropped in unexpectedly on your seventeen year old niece? She was stretched out on the couch watching a video with her boyfriend right. Hey! a stream of audio information was flooding into your off springs tiny brain as she snuggled into her mommy's tits. As your infant grew up she made the appropriate connections in her cerebral synapses as she learned that the 'c' word is naughty and it can get you in trouble. To avoid parental humiliation or worse she and all her little friends conspired to only use the 'c' word and others like it among themselves and their absolute closest friends. In time doing naughty things became a source of arousal for most of the kids in the neighbourhood so where is your little darling now? Well she's probably chained up to a bed somewhere, dressed in bondage gear, mouthing the words "fuck me monster". "Stick your monster cock down my throat and I'll blow you till your cum drips down into my hot, wet", ... Wait for it! thrill seekers, ...

pussy!!!

Are you still here? Listen! Profanities are so ingrained in the human experience that our lord and saviour comrade Jesus probably said *"Fuck!"* when he stubbed his divine big toe on a rock. It's ok folks. It's just another verbal expression like *"Oooh! goody"* when something positive and uplifting comes your way. I was given an eviction notice a few days ago due to ongoing complaints about swearing by my closest neighbour, who can no doubt hear me fart if I have the front door or window open too far. I'm convinced that I'm better suited to the lifestyle of a native or even some lone, nomadic drifter who lives outside the dictates of any kind of tribe or society and their strange, puritanical conventions. I learned from the hippies early in the game not to take other peoples bullshit on board and to always try and turn a negative situation into a positive. With this in mind I concluded that the best thing I could do is describe my feelings about being evicted in my writings so here we are.

The thing that is sure to spur my anger is if I ever make the fatal mistake of tinkering with intricate and complex manmade objects that have broken down. Case in question. I was attempting to replace the inner tube on my punctured E bike with knives, forks and spoons from the kitchen. I was out in the common area at the front of my ground level unit leaning over the upturned bike in my electric wheelchair. It was all going fine until the fork that was holding the tension between the rim and the tyre pinged back towards me, missing my eye by nano meters and it lodged my poor finger where the fork had been. As I normally do I commenced my tirade with Hungarian superlatives that I picked up as a child before my very bitter and angry mother called my migrant father a *"Dirty little wog bastard"*. That's when he made his escape to go and mine opals in the South Australian desert. So the Hungarian profanities became supplemented with English curses and swearwords as I attempted with no luck to dislodge my rosey red and throbbing index finger from between the rim and the tyre. Wouldn't you know it. At the very moment I managed to pry my finger free of the tyre my neighbour came bounding out from behind her palms and potted shrubs shouting *"I know you're bi-polar but you are doing all that swearing deliberately"*. I was frantically sucking on my swollen, pulsating finger and a little too occupied to say *"I didn't know anyone was around"*. The 'Resident Serial Informant' as I have dubbed her was no doubt straight on the phone to the housing provider to unleash yet another tale of terrible and obscene behaviour as she soaked in every molecule of drama the situation had afforded her. God dammed, fucking, zealot Christians I hate them. I spoke a bit with the dumb bitch when I first moved into the housing complex but as she eyed me choofing away on a spliff and sucking on a corona I sensed that we might come from opposite sides of the track. When she went into a long suffering sermon about how *"Drugs and alcohol are poisons according to the ways of the lord"* I lunged at the first opportunity to make an exit.

A week later while trying to appear 'right neighbourly' I invited her to my house warming party where old friends and new were gathered under the fairy lights in merriment and rowdy boistrosity. As the rowdiness grew she made her exit and for the remainder of the festivities she could be seen poking her head out from behind the bushes and muttering silently to herself.

Prior to becoming a part of the public housing system I was living a great outdoors adventure that was so far removed from the so called 'normal reality' people I crossed paths with used to say things like *"You're living the dream man"*. *"Yeah! sure bud. It beats the shit out of living in a nightmare."* With only my dog as a companion in remote estuaries and backwater lagoons I explored creeks, lakes and whole river systems from the lower River Murray in South Australia to the Northern Rivers and Far North Queensland. I first began my boating lifestyle by constructing a raft in Byron Bay from recycled materials and later on I graduated to a bamboo houseboat, then a Farrier tri-maran in beautiful Port Stephens. If ever I banged my thumb with a hammer or spilled hot coffee on my balls there was rarely ever anyone around for miles except my old hound husky boy who didn't give a flying fuck.

In these the later years of my life I have reasoned that most of the people living on the earth today have a right to be downright disappointed and angry about the world they have inherited. I believe this is especially true for under privileged kids everywhere. Whenever I am reflecting on the most significant details of my life my main mission is to root out and come to terms with the underlying causes of my anger because it's no fun to live with and it definitely goes a lot deeper than a banged up thumb or a stubbed toe. I think at the most primal level my aggression and hostility probably stem from the sense of threat I experienced as a very small child which was caused by plain and simple old hunger. Keeping my hunger at bay was the earliest sense of personal threat I ever experienced other than the headmasters cane or a swift backhander from my fifteen stone, violent mother. After the old man pissed off my siblings and I were raised on fortnightly welfare payments and handouts which provided barely enough to feed a hungry litter. To compensate for the lack of square meals on the table I regularly filled up on Vegemite sandwiches with lashings of lard in the place of margarine or butter. I also made beverages with beef stock cubes and if there was ever such a thing as leftovers I made toasties out of them on a heavy old waffle iron. The backyards in our neighbourhood were an oasis of fruit and nut trees so on hot summer nights I used to traverse the fences like a cat until I'd plucked my fill.



As I have explored the reasons why I am such a stressed out and hostile son of a bitch it has come to my attention that there is scientific research underway into a thing called 'Trans Generational Stress Disorder'. Put simply it means that when my father was participating in the Hungarian uprising and making his escape to Australia back in the fifties he may have downloaded all that accumulated anxiety and stress at some genetic level into his newborns. At a more superficial level I strongly suspect that the main source of my unpredictable bouts of hostility are related to a motorcycle smash that happened to me when I was seventeen. I was riding my newly acquired Suzuki motorbike home from work in the city when out of the peak hour traffic on my left came some spawn of the devil, mother fucker, hit and run driver who amputated my leg on his front bumper and just kept on driving. That dirty piece of shit rag deprived me of my youth which was spent in a variety of hospitals, rehabilitation centres and psyche wards. By his actions I was doomed to a life of welfare dependence as I rolled and tumbled onto the scrap heap of civilization. Luckily for me the leg was saved by game changing micro surgery operations which were hailed in the medical journals of the day as a world first. Yeah! sure, I hobbled out of the orthopaedic ward with both of my legs while all the other patients left minus one but with their loss went the pain and with me it has stayed till this day. There ought to be a law that all certified chronic pain sufferers should be exempt from any form of law pertaining to offensive language. In an ideal world I can well imagine the old crippled guy trying to struggle onto a bus with his walker might trip on the ramp and collapse in a pile at the kerbside. He might mutter *"Fucking cunt of a thing"* under his breath and the blue haired ladies in the front seats would gasp. The bus driver might well rush to help the old bloke up as the old timer mutters to himself *"Fucking Jesus my specs are all fogged up"*. *"I can't see a god dammed thing."* One of the old ladies might say to the driver *"Are you going to stand for that?"* and the driver would dutifully reply *"Have you got any tissues madam?"*

For anyone who has experienced little or no serious pain in their life it's pretty much an incomprehensible concept. I'm not talking about a bit of sunburn as a kid or bee stings and a cut finger. I'm talking about real pain like cancer or maybe a fish hook in the retina of your eyeball. Pain so all encompassing that nothing can distract you from it short of a merciful blast of morphine. Before my hit and run nemesis high tailed it out of there he managed to flip me off my motorbike like a water buffalo upending a lion that's grabbed her calf by the throat. I landed between a school bus and some cars fair square on my bum with both hands face down on the bitumen. One leg was laying flat before me unharmed but the other one was thigh up on my chest with the semi severed lower leg almost wrapped around my neck. If no concussion occurs there are a few brief moments before shock sets in where the full impact of the injury is perceived by the victim.

The closest I could compare it to would be how I imagine it would feel to be devoured alive by some awful hungry predator. After my initial hospital recovery and years of physio therapy I fought back to such an impressive degree that I was able to proudly dub myself the 'Disabled Superman'. I got away with it for more than three decades, achieving many a remarkable physical accomplishment, but in hindsight I was doing it all wrong. For so long I had been compensating for my damaged left side with my good right side and the imbalance gradually accumulated in my lower lumbar vertebrae and sciatic system. As well as this the constant banging and knocking in my damaged knee became increasingly more painful to such a degree that I have wear a support bandage at all times. So here I am all these years down the track, a grumpy, foul mouthed old cripple who is dependent on public housing for my accommodation and electric powered mobility devices to get me from A to B. With this eviction notice my greatest challenge has now become to beat the impending termination of my lease and maintain my position as a respectable, rent paying home dweller. I suspect the odds are in my favour because the young, newly appointed property manager that was assigned to my case made a glaring mistake by not providing me with an opportunity to explain my poor behaviour prior to issuing the eviction notice. On top of this no questions were ever asked about my mental health or physical condition when I first signed the rental agreement. My case manager has put me in contact with a tenancy legal service and my appointed lawyer assures me that I am not going to be forcefully evicted by the local cops three weeks before Christmas.

As the threat of homelessness loomed over my head I found myself speculating as to whether I would still have it in me to return to the life I was living before. It would mean that I'd have to hook up my industrial grade sack trolley behind the mobility scooter to transport my all camping gear and other belongings. Once I was in a well concealed and accessible camping spot near the local saltwater lagoon my biggest problem would be keeping the electric scooter charged up and running. My backup petrol generator and solar panel would be of some help but it would still mean long hours waiting around at the mall each day to get a full charge from one of the available power sockets. I've always been interested in things nautical and I guess my signature trademark would have to be the white and navy blue captains hat I've been wearing since I was a young man. It's quite intriguing that rarely a day goes by when I am out and about on the scooter where some rowdy stooge will manifest from out of nowhere standing at full attention and saluting. The mandatory "Captain!" is forthcoming and I generally return the salute with a friendly "Ahoy!". Onlookers always have a little chuckle and I'm seriously considering turning it into a busking routine for the summertime crowds in Manly. Loud techno, anthem trance music is always blaring out from my on board sound system to let people know I'm coming and pedestrians young and old often break into a dance with accompanying "Woo! hoo's".

It seems fitting that a would be sea captain with delusions of piracy and a bung leg such as I should have a parrot on his shoulder and after much experimentation developing an outside aviary the ideal feathered companion has made himself known to me. He's a light blue, peach faced love bird I have named 'Motley' and he's an unending source of entertainment that can easily snap me out of the shittiest of moods and anger attacks. All I have to do to wind him up is pretend to ignore him and he quickly takes time out from his tweeting and prining to get in my face and I'm talking literally folks.



'MOTLEY'

Not long after I moved into the unit I set up an online hobby enterprise called 'Steve's Boatyard' and It has turned into quite a little money spinner. My Pakistani support worker Imran became my boatyard assistant and his main job was to patch up all of the leaky, bargain priced inflatable boats I picked up on Facebook marketplace. We started doing the same with petrol and electric motors and by the end of last summer I was scooping up to three grand clear profit every couple of days or so.



THE STEVE'S BOATYARD COMPANY LOGO

Imran and I did a number of boating trips together to test out our repairs or just go fishing which was a totally new experience for him. If he caught the tiniest of unkeepable fish he would instantly pull out his phone and snap pictures of it to send to his friends and family in Pakistan. You can well imagine the first time he caught a matured adult flathead that was well above the legal limit. Imran was great to work with and being a devout Muslim he shared much of his religious knowledge. We often chatted as we worked about the Muslim philosophies and as a result I think I have become less of a xenophobic and ignorant infidel motherfucker. My only other connection with the Muslim world was an Afghani guy I knew in Byron Bay years before but it wasn't a friendly affair at all. I was in an art studio belonging to a friend at the 'Epicenter Art and Spirituality Centre' in Belongil before it was accidentally burned to the ground. Chris the artist was merrily painting away at his easel and sipping on a red wine as I entertained a couple of cute young Swedish backpackers who had popped in to visit him. So in walks this button pushing little Afghani nut job who I generally avoided at all costs and he poked his snotty hooked nose right in between me and the Swedish princess I was chatting up. He was mumbling some half English gibberish and making erratic hand gestures which really started to impact on our chummy little scene. Then he made the critical mistake of raising his arm just a little too fast in my direction. The girl had backed away in his presence so with a well directed swing my wine class went right into where his third eye would have been should the fucking little maggot have ever had one.

With the latest lockdown many support workers opted for easy to obtain government relief payments rather than clocking on for work and sadly my connection with Imran was lost among the health provider upheaval. The most recent support worker I have been assigned is called 'Joey D' and our very first meeting is memorable and worthy of mention. It was no sooner that Joe had walked into my living room before he lit up like a Christmas tree and shouted *"You're Steve Tripp the busker from The House of Peace!"* Well! None other ya'll! Joe had occupied one of the thirty or so rooms that were available at a squat community I founded in an old vacant monastery in Kings Cross in the mid eighties. He had experienced many of my outrageous antics at what was pretty much the peak of my experience as a street poet and performer and I could barely remember him at all due I guess to my bloated sense of self importance. Apart from all else he does to help me out Joe really showed his colours when the housing provider set up a three way phone meeting between themselves, my legal advisor and me speaking through Joe. On my behalf he meticulously explained how much of my bad language is due to the physical frustrations of being disabled and ongoing chronic pain. He articulated how my verbal aggression was not directed at any particular individual and went on to rejoice in the fact I had recently commenced anger management therapy. An ally if ever I had one.

Of all the bargain inflatables I've been refurbishing and reselling exactly the one I was hoping for landed on my doorstep. It's a barely used, Achilles 3.05 meter, hard floor with white and sky blue colouring and it's dimensions are such that I can sit my sorry old, crippled up arse in an easy chair at the rear of the vessel and operate the outboard motor. We recently embarked on our first ever boating excursion to Bayview on the Pittwater and what a near disaster it was. Once the boat was inflated and loaded up at the boat ramp it was eased into the water and Joe assisted me to climb on board. He stayed on the shore fishing as I turned on my 60lb stryker outboard and headed off to meet up with a friend 'Tor' who was living in his yacht near the marina. There was hardly a breeze as I motored out with the electric outboard and the water was smooth as glass. Then at the very moment I turned the steering to go into the marina the breeze picked up to become a seriously threatening headwind and the white capping waves I was heading into started blowing back and filling the boat. The inter locking floor boards started becoming separated because the one at the bow had not been connected properly. With the boards beneath me becoming unstable and almost floating I could barely remain seated in the easy chair as I held onto the tiller arm and an inner rubber lift handle. The electric outboard was seriously under powered in the changing conditions and it only just manoeuvred the inflatable as I was blown through all of the boats in the outer marina. Luckily I was able to throw my anchor and tie up to a bollard on some rich bastards private landing pontoon. Through the spray droplets on my glasses I was just barely able to see the screen on my mobile phone as I called for Tor on the yacht to come and rescue me.

With a reduced likelihood of me being thrown out on the pavement by my corporate landlords and greater freedom to travel after the latest lockdown I'm planning on taking advantage of the many discounted domestic flights on offer and paying a visit to my terminally ill youngest daughter in South Australia. Her name is Kianna and she is twenty six. Sadly she has an extremely rare and incurable condition known as 'Juvenile Batton Disease' and those with it are generally not expected to live past thirty or so. This might well be my last chance to connect with her before she is no longer with us, so while I still have some spare cash in the bank I have to act fast. The risk of a snap lockdown in South Australia or New South Wales is very real should more Covid variants raise their ugly heads and I don't want to be stranded in transit someplace in a bloody wheelchair. I'll be scanning the media the whole time I'm there and at the first hint of a Covid flare up I'll be winging it back home. The logistics of completing a return trip from Sydney to Adelaide are daunting to say the least considering I haven't done anything like it since I left the Northern Rivers. It means I'll have to travel on busses trains and aeroplanes in my powered wheelchair with a fully loaded backpack strapped to the back of my seat. I'll also strap on a couple of collapsible fishing rods because she lives on the Southern Beaches and who knows what I might catch. I'll enlist the help of a support worker when I land in Adelaide and he can be the ground crew for my big Southern adventure. I can well imagine I'll have lots to write about on my return to old Sydney town in a week or so.

CHAPTER THREE

PRE FLIGHT INTERTENSION

Hi! I'm back early. Well to tell you the truth I haven't even gone yet. The writing bug has well and truly got it's hooks in me and I've decided I can't wait until my return from South Oz to start tapping away at the keys again. I've got absolutely no clue what it is I'm going to bang on about in this chapter because I'm taking a big leap of faith away from the sequence of my story and diving headlong into the realms of whatever pops into being when I simply follow my pen. I've done this kind of thing before with writing and also with lithographic drawings. I call it my 'Subconscious Scrawl'. I've found that through the random placement of words or decorative lines and squiggles things that are not intentional can suddenly jump into the centre of my focus and offer meaning where there was none before. Not wanting to brag but I think this may in some way be connected to the process, ... 'Salvador Dalí' and others of that ilk pursued in their surrealist paintings.

I didn't sleep a wink last night as a virtual tsunami of words, images and haunting music cascaded through my skull offering tantalizing and previously unimagined insights into the illusive mysteries of my own existence. While we're on the subject of things filtering into the deepest recesses of my mind I was smoking a joint just before daybreak and I was suddenly struck with the odd perception that I have absolutely no idea where my thoughts come from. There's an ongoing debate as to whether the human brain is the source of transmission for all thoughts and ideas or if it's a receptor of some kind that might merely channel information from external dimensions completely detached from our terrestrial experience. If we are going to truly explore the intricate machinations of our somewhat evolved consciousness there are the equally illusive concepts of mind and spirit to consider. I think human imagination would have to be a key factor in support of the idea that we are the originators and blueprint makers of whatever manifests into our tangible reality. Aah! Yes I hear you say. But what of the theory that all creation is an artificial simulation generated in and of itself and dispersed throughout the space time continuum like the infinite fingers of some delicate eternal snowflake. Since before the dawn of civilization the concept of a free standing, omnipotent entity or god has been nurtured in the collective thinking of tribes and societies across the globe who had no prior knowledge of each others existence. This undisputed anthropological fact would have to suggest at the very least that collective imagination is a very real and measurable reality.

The other intriguing snippet of information concerning the earth's indigenous tribes is the belief that those who accumulate more worldly resources or possessions than they could possibly ever need are suffering from a form of mental illness. I hope that doesn't mean I'm completely fruit loops because I stashed ten pounds of home grown weed underground out in the local swampland. Nah! No way. I'll choof that lot away easy peazy before it's my time to start pushing up daisies.

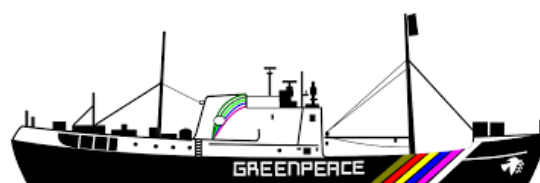
Back in the days when I was still tinkering with hallucigenics I was subject to a variety of experiences that went well beyond my everyday type of vivid hallucinations, like the fifteen foot high, pink scaled dragon that emerged from a flickering lantern in a Chinese restaurant. or the hydraulic door stopper that suddenly developed mechanical legs and antennae and crawled around the ceiling of my living room like an alien crustacean. No this was something different. It was an inner knowledge that I was somehow close to the core of all meaning and my destiny was written in the stars.

When I was about seven years old I contracted a severe bout of the whooping cough that rendered me bed ridden and almost ended my young life. In the final days of my recovery it was late in the night and there were visitors listening to records with my mother up the hall in the lounge room. I was wide awake and suddenly I felt compelled to get out of bed and venture out into the cold night air. As I looked skyward I beheld an enormous array of multi coloured lights moving silently over our neighbourhood. I had no idea what I had seen until years later when as a teen I started watching sci-fi movies and was able to connect the dots. On one of my outer limits magic mushy trips I was driving my van in the Adelaide hills and I was suddenly aware that the old clapped out transit was moving faster up and down the winding slopes than the pressure of my foot on the pedal should allow. Something happened that I couldn't really say was like a voice in my head but whatever it was it told me to take my foot off the pedal which I ever so reluctantly did. In the minutes that followed I experienced my van going up and down one hill after another for about three miles without any reduction in speed. I was pretty mind blown by what had just taken place and I pulled over to take stock of the situation. I grabbed my torch to look under the bonnet at the accelerator cable and all was well. When I hopped back in the drivers seat and commenced to drive off that same unseen backseat driver communicated to me *"If you need more proof just look in the mirror"*. On picking up this truly weird instruction I got the jitters and headed home avoiding my rear view mirrors at all costs for fear I might see the squinting eyes and salivating mandibles of some strange, alien hitch hiker.

Outside of my time in organisations like the cubs and the boy scouts I think I got to live through a number of chapters that could be described as tribal experience. Not so much in primary school where I was bullied for being a singing and dancing extrovert who preferred drawing pictures more than sport. That is of course if you don't count running where I was the mostly unbeaten primary and high school champion.

My only real competition was a kid called Stephen Parker the son of our school bus driver, but by the time we left school I had won the most trophies. My first real taste of belonging to any kind of gang was when my old lady got hitched to a well to do farmer on the wheat belt in South Australia. I was suddenly the proud owner of a Honda trailbike and in the company of twelve or so other farmboys we ripped up the rural tracks and trails at every opportunity. Alas I graduated from dirt bikes to roadsters when I moved to the big city and I've already shared the grizzly details of what happened next.

The crew of physically and mentally disabled characters I hooked up with at the live in rehabilitation centre were a raggle taggle assembly of misfits with whom I did my first experimentations in weed and psychedelics and they will always be remembered fondly. As soon as I was partially recovered and capable of showing off in public again I became a street performer and a part of the rowdy busking community in Sydney. This opened up doors to the hussling and bussling nightclub scene of the inner city where I was welcomed in behind exclusive closed doors by my trusty crew of bouncers and security guards. Around the same time I lived in a number of art communities like 'Fed Art', 'Art haven' and 'The Earth Repair Foundation' all of which had human creativity at their core. After escaping Sydney with a four hundred dollar a day cocaine habit I thumbed a ride to Nimbin on the Northern Rivers and that's where the real meaning of tribal belonging touched my life. I teamed up with a few of the local buskers who were also time hardened activists at some of the earliest protest actions in Australia. Becoming a member of the 'Earth Repair Army' was where all of my prior tribal experience had been leading to and I now feel that I don't need to look any further in this world for my kind of people. I'm sure genetics must play a real important part in the social networking systems that fall into place in this the modern world. I watch a lot of documentaries about every subject under the sun and I pay special attention to anything that involves alternative communities and lifestyles. The video I'm watching may be about the 'Burning man festival' in an American desert or people building homes from recycled coke bottles in Germany but it's as if all the people in the video's are from the same family connected bloodline. More than just the clothes and jewellery they wear or the dreddies hanging off their heads they exude a special aura of knowing and purpose that you don't often see in other human collectives. It would be of great benefit to this troubled world if those I speak of were seeded from beyond the heavens and are the actual 'Rainbow Warriors' described in the ancient Indian legends. A sacred and divine tribe who are on the earth to protect it from the plunderous majority of our species.





That spooky alien stowaway visited me in a lucid dream the other night and he telepathed a majestic vision in my direction that I can't get out of my brain. He told me that humankind strayed off the track towards evolutionary perfection just after the point where we mastered agriculture and the co-operative efforts of medium sized communities. From then on right up through the industrial revolution until the present day our quest for knowledge and power has been a lesson we had to learn about how not to live on a planet. Like they say it's less than a minute to midnight on the evolutionary clock and now a clear and present danger, the common enemy to all has been given a face and a name. It's the few degrees in global temperature that are the only difference between a healthy sustainable environment and a fast desertifying planet where even micro organisms might not be able to survive. The race is on to see if the culture of denial and human greed can beat the culture of minimalism and peace. The winners in this epic battle of opposing philosophies will gain the position of power where they can control the direction the mass of humanity follows towards the future. The telepathic vision I beheld includes a prediction that the world's human occupants will adopt a military footing in the co-operative battle to deal with our common crisis and all employment will be assigned by our unified world governments in a mission to regenerate all natural systems as fast as humanly possible. All large corporations deemed unsustainable will be scaled down and eventually made obsolete as co-operatively managed resources are facilitated by all. Thorium nuclear power generation is likely to end up being the big winner in providing most of our energy needs to the big cities and the renewables will supplement the grid from medium sized ruralised communities who practice sustainable food production on microbially regenerated land. The acidification of the world's oceans will be managed by vast sea platform settlements who run sustainable fish and kelp farms as they draw power from the waves and eliminate micro plastics world wide. Local and national water wars will be avoided as ground breaking new technologies are developed that can create free standing weather systems and produce natural drinking water.



CHAPTER FOUR

FOR THE TIME BEING ITS ENOUGH

JUST BEING A FUN LOVING BEING

All going to plan I think I'll be able to book my ticket to Adelaide tomorrow morning and I'll leave this coming Friday but there's still so much to arrange in the way of finding the best transport options to and from the airports and also the availability of wheelchair accessible accommodation when I arrive. Things are looking pretty stable on the Covid 19 front at the moment but a new variant has just been detected in South Africa and all it would take is a careless slip at one of our borders and a new lockdown will be upon us. Even though this trip is going to be a fingers crossed affair I'm looking forward to it more with each passing day. The forthcoming journey is crucial to the relationship I share with my ailing daughter and also to the continuation of my newly invigorated memoirs. It's actually the first time ever I would have embarked on a new adventure with the knowledge that it's going to be immortalised in the next chapter of my book. Well there's your daily update on my present reality bondage enthusiasts and here's another riveting excerpt from the first draft of my log. It's called 'Being Here Now' which is actually no longer correct because the now I was describing back then was in a different time slot to this now that we are living in. You'll catch on.

BEING HERE 'No OLD WORRIES!'



There's been a bit of a marijuana drought happening around the bay just lately, due to increased border patrols by the ever vigilant Drug Enforcement Agencies. As well as their normal routine of checking out suspect vehicles at the frontiers they have also started boarding interstate tourist coaches with mean and intimidating sniffer dogs. It's harvest time on the Northern rivers and the annual migration of weed smuggling hippies and other get rich quick enthusiasts are traversing our great nation, in the quest to sell their illegal produce. At last! Some much welcomed and therapeutic relief is at hand. After three dry, long weeks of pulling my dreadlocks out in pure anguish, I have acquired some top shelf 'Mexican dancing tobacco' from a Nimbin pot grower who paid me a visit on his way through to Sydney. Inspiration has finally arrived to nourish my idea starved imagination. Having scored some fresh, sticky, purple buds from 'The Land of The Rainbows' I am finally able to turn the ignition on my psychic engines. I can feel those philosophical turbo boosters starting to warm up for action and my enthusiasm sensors are tingling with childlike excitement. The countdown has commenced to the end of my literary procrastinations.

I've been threatening to write a book for so very long, it must have appeared like I was never going to make a start. A head full of great ideas is one thing but where in hell and the high heavens do you begin to translate that infinite myriad of thoughts, memories and wild imaginings into the written word? Having finally made a start I have just ignited a Bob Marley sized 'spliff' to celebrate the occasion and help me to compose the second page. Now like a solar flare of exploding THC molecules all over my brain, waves of pure inspiration are re-invigorating my sagging neural synapsis. Wait a minute. A fleeting gem of wisdom just became lodged in my cerebral cortex.

'THERES NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT'

COUNTDOWN COMPLETE!

T MINUS,... ZERO,...

IGNITION!

LIFT OFF!



Because the title and over all theme of this the opening chapter are about my current reality I will describe what is taking place right now. As we speak. In the moment and all the rest of that 'New Age' claptrap. At this precise moment in time my face is being veraciously molested by a fur covered creature with lashing claws and sharp, pointed teeth. No I'm not having some kind of weird, hallucigenic trip. I'm playing with an adorable, bouncing puppy who seems to have appointed me as her personal teething toy. This fluffy, little ball of energy is the dominant female of the litter and she is quite skilled in the art of procuring all of my attention, even when I am, ... 'Ouch!' trying to tap on these silly plastic keys and roll joints at the same time. Ow! That one hurt. Vicious little bitch. Now she is jumping on the keyboard as I try to write. Such childish fun indeed. I am currently playing nursemaid to a litter of five week old pups and acquiring a newfound sympathy for the plight of sleep deprived and exhausted parents.

My dog the irrepressible 'Tootsy' went and got herself impregnated by some mangy drifter when last we were in the Blue mountains. In a classic display of recycling ingenuity I devised what I thought was an impenetrable chastity belt out of a sawn off pair of jeans and some old buckles and straps from an ancient backpack. I guess it only goes to show, ...

•NATURES WAY IS STRONGER THAN THE THREADS IN AN OLD PAIR OF LEVIS•

My most current reality would have to include Young William who just this moment phoned me up to say hello. Will is one of the few remaining friends I have maintained contact with from the old days and he is the key inspiritor for the travel journal you are about to read. Will has been pestering me for ages to start compiling my memoirs of the early busking and protest days, so with the rising of the sun this fine September morning I have decided to go hands on with it and look! Hey! Presto ... we are already on the second page. Young William is a fellow environmentalist and a true comrade to the movement. When first we met I was a free roaming street performer around Sydney and he was a budding real life, action photographer. In the very early days of mastering photographic skills his principal subject matter was the performances of the inner city busking community and the blood splattered goings on at the environmental frontline. Many a time while we were attending a blockade or a rally William would be there snapping away with his camera and capturing volumes of priceless shots, as the collective passion gathered steam.

The birth of the pups is the crescendo to a long standing relationship I have shared through the years with Tootsies genetic bloodline. Her uncle Rufus was the first pup I adopted from litters that were born at 'Quick Bucks Wrecking yard' in Port Stephens. That's where I live. Among the rocky headlands at beautiful Shoal Bay, on the New South Wales, East coast of Australia. Since Rufus I have had three other dogs from that bloodline including Toots but all are no more from one unfortunate event or another. As a companion for Tootsy girl I decided to keep a male dog from one of her previous litters. I named him 'Husky' in a mode of wishful thinking that when he matured to full strength he might help to pull my bicycle up some of the steep slopes around the bay. No such luck. All attempts to get him working efficiently with the bike proved futile because he was too easily distracted by other dogs and I couldn't get him to hold a constant position. In the end I decided that some dogs must have what it takes to haul a load and others haven't. From that day on Husky has been left at home with Toots to guard my camp whenever I go out. At night however when I go fishing both Hus and Tootsy girl get to bounce along beside me on the way out to the jetty. This generally happens in the wee small hours after the car traffic has subsided and the streets of our village are deserted. On most mornings as the first hint of the new day is approaching the horizon my dogs and I can be found out on the headland jigging for squid and octopus, or casting into the shallows for flathead and silver bream. sun is starting to reflect off the water and the milk delivery van is pulling up at the general store. Apart from the fact I have to get the dogs off the streets before the traffic resumes, the buzzing, biting insects make it no fun to be out there once the sun is up.



**OUT FISHING FOR THE FIRST TIME
WITH HUSKY PUPPY**

If I am in luck with the morning catch we will be on our way back home by the time the Myself and my canine buddies live in one of the last remaining pockets of what was the original fishing village. We share a corner block at the foot of the Tomaree headland with a retired fisherman known as 'Old Sid'. Sid is eighty seven and he has been living here for sixty odd years. This place he calls home hasn't changed in character from when it was first built way back when and the rest of Shoal bay has been developed into a modernized coastal suburbia like the Gold coast or Miami beach. Looking upwards to the east out of my back door, I am blessed with the vision of a towering, monolith known as Stephens peak which lies just beyond the dunes. I like to believe I live a perfect and charmed existence, so I consider it a cruel twist of fate that the founding fathers didn't spell the name of that mountain with a 'V' instead of 'PH'. The reason I place so much importance on that big chunk of rock is because it's very symbolic of the new peaks of artistic discipline and productivity I have achieved since first I settled in the bay. The creative projects I am involved in besides this newly acquired book writing caper are the development of three albums of original songs I composed and recorded over the last couple of decades. One of the albums is complimented by a script for an environmentally inspired stage production called 'Once upon a Planet'. It's an adventure fantasy about a group of schoolkids who want to do their bit for the environment. They abscond from the schoolyard one day and team up with a convoy of hard core activists who are heading for a frontline blockade.

The kids are swept along on a thrill a minute adventure, which brings them to the attention of the world media. Their mission to save the planet triggers a global stock market battle between the growing environment friendly sector and the established markets, as they go head to head for world dominance.

Copy and paste this link to hear the song.
https://youtu.be/jfg7z1-_x-c

Once upon a Planet

Once upon a planet in the history of the world
There was a song that became the favorite tune of every boy and girl
On every land across the globe they sang it with optimism and hope
and everybody that heard it had to sing along.

Oh! Yes and ...

Once upon a planet when those children sang their song
They sang it loud and they sang it proud so confident and strong
It was a tale by human beings
All about being human being
So come on everybody and help us sing our song.

And we sing ...

We are all humans _ humans are we
we live on planet earth as she spins around in the galaxy.
When something's bad we ban it, because we love our planet
it's the home of humanity.

Once upon a planet the oceans were all clean
the weather was fine and the earth was rich
and the countryside was green.
The air was fresh and pure, the sky was so much bluer
but we changed that when we came on the scene.

Oh! yes we, ...

Let our poison waste spill into rivers lakes and seas
we changed the weather patterns when we chopped down all the trees.
We filled the air with our pollution, but there is one solution
and we call it _ ECOLOGY!

And we sing _

We are all humans _ humans are we ...
we live on planet earth as she spins around in the galaxy.
When something's bad we ban it, because we love our planet
it's the home of humanity.

Once upon a planet at the edge of the galaxy
at the end of the age of ignorance and the start of a brand new century.
At the birth of a new generation, and the dawn of a one earth nation
of this multi-cultural family.

Oh! yes we, ...

put aside our differences and we found we were the same
then we put it all down to experience because nobody is to blame.
When we think global and act local, the world becomes our focal point.
we can heal the earth _ in creations name.

And we sing, ...

We are all humans _ humans _ are we _
we live on planet earth as she spins around in the galaxy.
When something's bad we ban it, because we love our planet
it's the home of humanity.

Once upon a planet some children sang a song
That soon became so popular the whole world sang along.
It was sung by every nation at a worldwide celebration
By a choir that was ten billion people strong.

And we sang ...

(Double chorus)

We are all humans _ humans _ are we _
we live on planet earth as she spins around in the galaxy.
When something's bad we ban it, because we love our planet
it's the home ... of humanity

(Music slows down with a vocal retardation on the word, ...

flu ... man ... | ... | ... | ... | ... tee ... ee ... ee ... ee ... ee ... ee ... eeeee!)

Shoal bay represents significant progress for me as a struggling artist who is trying to plod along in a world governed by pursuit of the almighty dollar. As we approach the new millennium and harder economic times ahead I imagine places like this will become increasingly harder to find. It's well outside the normal rental market and that's where I like to live, so I am not subject to the scrutiny of money grabbing landlords. Sid won't take a cent over twenty dollars a week as rent for the shed I occupy out the back in the courtyard because I cook up his evening meals and help him out with odd jobs around the place. This wonderful arrangement leaves the bulk of my fortnightly pension payments to spend as I see fit and allows the acceptable quota of time to develop my projects free of the normal economic pressures. Many of the musicians and artists I know spend most of their time and energy working day jobs and chasing the dollar just to pay the rent. By the time they get home in the evenings they are too fucked out to be bothered with anything and their art becomes just another memory of younger days when they were free of responsibility. I will do anything not to end up painted into the same kind of corner even if it means living a solo existence for the rest of my days, camping in peoples garages and being devoured by maggots in a paupers grave.



WETTING A LINE OFF THE SHOAL BAY JETTY.

Sid is a remarkable old guy and there's a lot going on between us beside the fact I am renting a bit of studio space from him. He's a time hardened old sea captain in the twilight of his years and he is fighting what may be his last battle to ward off senility. I am the younger man in the equation. The deck hand, like a waiting sponge, to absorb his unending catalogue of knowledge and stories from the high seas. I believe our 'Old salt' 'Young salt' relationship is the main thing keeping his mind active and it reduces the amount of time he spends slumped in his easy chair, sipping port wine and staring blankly into space. In more sober and reflective moments he can impart priceless gems of wisdom from a long life of experience.

In not so sober moments he might be giving me instructions around the place and he'll suddenly break into an old sea shanty mid sentence. At other times he will go into a colorful tale like the time he wrestled a giant octopus off the deck of his fishing boat in a storm. The last time Sid went out on a trawler in deep water, he copped a stingray barb right through his left leg and it ended his fishing career. The wound went septic as the result of a dormant bug he contracted in the tropics during world war two. It's been about twenty years since he received the injury but still unhealing boils and purple infected blotches remain. Every Tuesday a government home carer pops around and he has a couple of fisho's mates, but apart from them he has limited contact with people. A semi hermetic lifestyle like Sid's becomes more appealing to me the older I get after more than two decades of baring my soul to the world. The life of any performer can be controlled by public expectation and I was sick of being the life of the party. A raging cocaine habit gave me the first warning signs that I was all peopled out and to fully recover I needed to be alone.

After two failed attempts at parenting with badly matched partners I had succumbed to depression and all but lost my trusty old brand of self confidence. A prolonged creative hiatus had stripped me of a purposeful function in the world and I was left wallowing in the love tainted backwaters of my own misery. My escape from the world of normal, daily relationships was the first leg of this journey towards a solitary existence. The sweet, unhindered bliss of independence can bring great rewards for those who are centered enough to cope with it. The man who is not dependent on the affections of a woman and people in general has all the time in the world to ponder the purpose of his own existence. He can reflect on the path he has travelled to get where he is at and he can take time to imagine the place he wants to be. I am a devotee to the concept of creativity and the new title I have given myself is that of an 'Art monk'. In my time as a seeker of the higher truth's and philosophies, the most profound universal truth I have stumbled upon is the notion that 'Art and Creation' are one and the Same thing. The idea that human creativity is in some way linked to the base level, organic processes of life is the most inspiring concept I can possibly imagine and it has become the new bottom line on my spiritual beliefs. Often my creative frenzies are followed by a profound sense of worthlessness where all attempts to get motivated are too daunting a chore to even contemplate. This is normally the time when the call to the water hits me and I load up my pushbike to go fishing. Fishing is the best thing I've found to silence my thoughts as it engages me in the simplistic ritual of the hunt. The coastal aborigines had the right idea. Their days were mainly spent out on the water, chasing the catch and just letting the day roll by at it's own leisurely pace. Once they had caught their tucker they might get a fire going for a tribal cook up and then illustrate the hunt on the walls of their cave. Simplicity, no complications, No chattering monkeys in their brains and no high pressure deadlines to meet.



This property was a fish processing depot back in the heyday of the Australian fishing industry. That was long before there was talk of marine park sanctuaries and depleted fish stocks. The political spin I refer to has seen this once thriving fishery transformed from a productive catch dependent community into just another tourist trap. During the summer months Sid sells bait to the tourists and that's about the limit of his physical abilities these days. Any poor, unsuspecting customer who has been lured in by the 'Bait and Ice' sign is left standing around for ages in the heat and the flies as he takes his own sweet time getting from his easy chair to the freezer. As a rule he makes a healthy profit selling block ice and bait to the 'Touros'. He does however hate the vacationing public with a passion and any suggestion of over pricing will see him bellowing profanities, as he rolls up his shirt sleeves and goes into a punch ready posture. All offenders are promptly ordered off the property then he has a little chuckle when they are gone. Eighty seven years old.

My hero!

There are dual level holiday apartments incorporated into the front of the property that are rented out through an estate agent during the holiday season. The rest of the year they are occupied by all manner of humanity who are in need of short term accommodation. Between the holiday units and my courtyard there is a classic nineteen fifties caravan sheltered under a rusting corrugated iron structure. This is where the old boy lives. All of the wooden beams around the caravan have cobweb strewn wine bottles and colored glass balls hanging from them in tattered fish net stockings. He has old photographs scattered all around the place of himself from the war days as a younger, uniformed man. They are perched in key positions around his habitat and he has time perished war medals hanging on the wall near the entrance to the cool rooms.

Shoal bay is undergoing a rapid and regrettable boom in local development since the once friendly and inviting little drinking hole down on the corner started metamorphosing into a full blown Surfers Paradise style resort. It's all happening directly across the road from where we live and our once tranquil little village has been afflicted by the same degree of banging, grinding, haul ass noise you might expect to find in the construction sites of any large city. The first stage of the operation was to demolish all of the classic nineteen fifties and sixties beach houses at the rear of the old pub to make way for the new multi million dollar resort. This was all taking place as I was in the early stages of converting a dusty old shed into a live in recording studio, so I started taking advantage of the situation to my own ends. There were large piles of sturdy hardwood beams left sitting around in unfenced areas of the building site, so I started doing moonlight runs to gather up as much as I could. I viewed the free timber as compensation for all of the unwanted noise pollution spilling into the neighborhood from first light to dusk every day of the god damned week. Included in my compensation package I managed to get away with six enormous plastic tarpaulins that were used for covering assorted equipment and the like. I also scored enough plyboard sheets to completely seal the shed, but I had to go through a cyclone wire fence with bolt cutters to get them. The Weis corporation will always be remembered as a worthwhile sponsor in my quest to live outside of the mainstream rental market and spread the word about environmental sustainability. ***'I love being a recycling enthusiast living in a disposable society'***

Since I acquired the building materials I have converted a dusty old shed filled with the remnants of a life on the water into a fully lined and water proofed recording studio come writers retreat. 'The Crab Pot Lodge' as I have christened my home is mostly obscured from the view of the surrounding holiday flats by a high metal fence and a row of mature palm trees. In the courtyard area I have used hardwood beams and a couple of large tarps to create an outside kitchen area. The shelter is covered with shade cloth I scored from the resort and it offers a pleasant view of the side street leading up to Stephens peak. At the height of the tourist season I might be sitting in my outside kitchen preparing chilli octopus or basting a silver bream and I get to watch bikini clad, young babes skipping by on their way down to the beach.



SOME OF MY HANDY WORK IN THE COURTYARD

Compared to other less inviting places I have lived the Crab pot Lodge is a dream house located in paradise. As daily renovations continue it's getting so cosy that I find myself having mini panic attacks at how comfortable it's all getting. I'm so afraid of becoming just another fat and self satisfied wanker who is too lazy and contented to go out in search of the next adventure. Jesus I've even started getting into gardening for the first time in my life and that's a past time that can anchor a man to the same place for a lifetime. The gardening thing is my new obsession and I'm embracing the art of green thumbing with all the enthusiasm of a giant slug, devouring the fronds of a marijuana seedling. In the last few weeks the courtyard has become home to a number of newly constructed garden plots which line the back fence. Disused wooden pallets form the basic framework of the plots and cement filled chicken wire has created the deep soil filled cavities between them. The plots stand about waist high which means the minimum amount of bending for my tired old back as I am pottering around in the dirt. I consider my new gardening interests a 'Hands on' therapy workshop that not only keeps me fit but it has great psychological value. It relates to my childhood experience and is directly connected to the primal scene thing 'Arthur Janov' explored in his writings. My mother as you will come to discover was an unstable and violent bitch who made my life hell as a child. As best I can deduct my personal primal scene occurred in a garden setting as a nine or ten year old child.

I had been instructed to remove weeds from a flower bed which I was doing when out of the blue I received a sally winder in the back of the head. This was followed by the old bags usual rantings as she bellowed out all over the neighborhood that I had missed a couple of weeds. The good Doctor Janov would conclude that this was the point at which I could endure no more humiliation or pain and split off as an escape mechanism into an alternative reality. Whatever the case once I had isolated the cause for my aversion to gardening I became an overnight horticultural zealot. By the end of my first spring season there was food in abundance growing all over the courtyard. Corn as tall as myself, tomatoes and pumpkins climbing all over the place and a herb garden that wouldn't falter in productivity. My ongoing cement sculpturing experimentations manifested a fishpond which had an big old cast iron bath as it's base. Floating lotus flowers adorned the cool water of the pond and it was to become my most treasured refuge in the stinking heat of summer. One morning as I was Cheerfully pulling weeds among the coriander I noticed that a rogue pumpkin had started climbing towards the roof of my dwelling. Across the angle of the roof there is a wooden platform which is home to stacks of disused fish tubs. As I scanned the scene I took note that the area caught lots of sunshine and it could not be viewed from any of the upper story holiday units surrounding our property. I grabbed a ladder and climbed up for a better look and once on the platform the idea to create a roof garden took shape among my thoughts. I had a bunch of marijuana seedlings sprouting in my outside kitchen waiting for the day when I could transfer them to new locations, but if I played my cards right I might be able to pull off a mini crop right where I was living. The maturing plants could be concealed from view in the large spaces between the pumpkin shrouded fish tubs. They would receive heaps of direct sunlight on the roof and I would have a valid reason for being up there with a hose due to the existence of the roof garden. My strategy paid off nicely and I managed to bring sixteen plants to maturity by the end of the harvest season. None of the neighbors were any the wiser about my little operation and for the entire winter that followed I was spared having to race off every few days looking for a pot dealer. The final cured product was almost equal in potency to any of the buds I had been scoring around the bay and I saved a shit load of cash in the meantime.

For most of the time that I have been here Sid and I have done our running around in a beat up old Ford Falcon sedan that he has lovingly named the 'Golden Oldie. I can't fathom how he is still able to hold a license but I guess until he runs some poor bastard over he is still considered a bonified road user by the cops. If only they knew what I know. The mad old fart is the greatest exponent of road rage I have ever encountered and I say about twenty 'Hail Mary's' under my breath every time I have to jump in the car with him. It's a matter of mutual dependence where I have to place my life in his hands so I can achieve what I have to do and in turn I do all his running around like paying bills and getting our supplies in. Just recently the car came up for renewed registration and as expected it didn't pass the mechanical inspection. Sid simply shrugged it off as a minor inconvenience and within a week we were tearing around in a well kept Volvo station wagon that he picked up from an old mate in the car game. It was a real bargain at the price he got it for and I drew a modicum of comfort from the knowledge they are rated as one of the safest cars in the world.

The reason I am on disability support is due to the fact I was run down by a hit and run driver in my youth. One of my greatest fears is the thought that I might end my days in some orthopedic ward due to the carelessness of another person. I gnash at the bit when I am a passenger with the most skilled of drivers but with old Sid it's a thousand times worse. I was spared any further anguish late one afternoon when Sid failed to return from a war veteran's reunion at the RSL. He was dropped off at home well after sundown by a couple of his fisho cronies, amid tales of a totalled volvo, abuse towards hospital staff and the risk of prosecution by the police. It came as a welcomed relief that he wasn't seriously injured or worse, but more so that my own chances of survival had been greatly increased. The wreck of the Volvo was promptly scooped up by our old mate 'Quick Bucks' from out at the wrecking yard for a mere two hundred dollars. I guess it's quite obvious that's how the money grabbing son of a bitch got his nickname. After Sid's license was revoked by the authorities it pretty much signaled the beginning of the end for him. As dangerous as he was to himself and others on the road the ability to drive a car was his last chance at any kind of mobility or freedom. When it was taken away he became like a once majestic old sea eagle whose wings have been clipped. He had died in spirit if not in the flesh and he seemed to give up on everything at once. At a greatly increased rate he declined into a withdrawn state of semi catatonic oblivion. Gone were the sea shanties on sunny drunken afternoons and fish dinners garnished with good cheer. Gone was everything but the memories I held and still hold, of golden moments shared with my sea captain. And the echo of the old boy grunting 'Bound for South Australia' through his wine stained whiskers.

Bon voyage Sid.



CHAPTER FIVE

YEEE! HAAW! GIRLIE!

YA'LL SHAKE THAT THERE TAIL FEATHER



The transition from a violent and nightmarish childhood to an almost dreamlike teenage experience occurred in my fifteenth year when I was swept up in a chain of events that relocated me from my welfare ghetto stomping ground to a picturesque rural landscape where the only thing that mattered was loud music, looking good and getting laid. I'll always be grateful for those times because they more than likely saved me from serious jail time and little known to me back then they were the absolute golden years of my life. No longer just another raggedy arsed poor kid from the suburbs I became a strong, self assured young man who did what I liked when I wanted to and I fitted in anywhere I chose to be. My new stepfathers family name is Bowyer which originated in medieval England and was born of the bow and arrow makers tradition. In Google Earth you will find 'Bowyer Road' on the Adelaide plains which is the area that became my new home and the setting for my first experience in love. Well You know sex. Hey! Horizontal folk dancing. Fucking Ya'll.

18/3/1987

DOWN ON THE FARM



After years of steadfast persistence the old girl actually landed the wealthy farmer she always dreamed of finding. The wedding ceremony and pissup that followed took place on the front lawn of our housing trust duplex, to the tearful and squawking delight of my mothers girlfriends a hysterical, love starved gaggle of neurotic females. The honeymoon if you can call it that was a family affair. It took the form of a house moving, screaming shit storm from our house in Elizabeth to a small, rural township called Owen, on the dusty wheat belt of the Adelaide plains.

It was the peak of the summer and our new family home turned out to be a large family caravan parked in a stinking hot wheat shed in very close proximity to noisy pig pens. My mother complained the whole time about the flies and other discomforts, but I didn't mind it at all because everything was new and I had an unexplored world to survey. My newly acquired stepfather was named Bryant and he was the most quiet and unassuming country gentleman you could want to meet. It staggered me how this easy going and likeable fellow could be attracted to an emotional time bomb like my mother. Who gives a rats arse why they were together. I was receiving the spoils of the good life and that was all that mattered to me. From the limited options of life on the poverty line I was suddenly living in a world of wealth, and increased opportunity. Bryant was still a virgin when he got married at the age of forty and this became public knowledge at the wedding reception thanks to the old girls tactless tongue. He is such a good natured country bumpkin that he just shrugged it off. His cheeks were illuminated to a slightly more red and flustered tone than usual as he said, "Awe! gee! dear, ... you don't have to tell everyone".

With little chance that Bryant and my mother would be bringing any children into the world I suppose he saw us kids as his new family. To win our affections a bounty of gifts and services were forthcoming which made him a very agreeable new daddy indeed. I was the proud owner of a Honda trail bike at the age of sixteen which only would have happened in my dreams a short time earlier. I had the use of Bryant's big old Chrysler right up until I got my full licence then he financed a two tone purple and white FC Holden for me. Independent mobility means everything when you are a testosterone charged young hoon and the acquisition of my vehicles through Bryant brought a brand of gratitude, unlike any I had ever felt for my mother. This fine upstanding citizen whom I had now come to address as 'Dad' was an Elder of the local Anglican parish. His colonial ancestors had helped to settle the wheat belt and the family name is engraved in a plaque on the cornerstone of the tiny country steeple.

To the best of my knowledge there has never been any form of scandal or mischief on the family tree and no skeletons lurk in their well kept farmhouse closets. Being righteous and God fearing people Bryant's family took acception to the fact he had married a divorced woman and someone from outside of the district. Because of his decision to marry my old lady he was disinherited from the family riches just after the wedding by his frail and rickety old father. Most of the clan didn't hesitate in expressing their views about his choice of wives and very rarely did any of them come to visit. Only when Bryant's miserable, cow poke old father moseyed on to the big grazing pasture in the sky did the family agree to contest the will. It was done begrudgingly but a new will was eventually drawn up and Bryant was included. Then it turned into a feeding frenzy of pure greed as his siblings pecked and squabbled over petty differences in what they had received.

These seemingly respectable folk worked the farm tirelessly and went to church without fail each Sunday. They wouldn't ever think of trying to cheat the tax man and swear words were never heard around women. It's quite unthinkable that any of them would invoke the rage of 'The Almighty' by having a little root before they were married and that's why my middle age stepfather had never got his rocks off. Bryant's brothers and sisters ranged in age from nineteen to thirty four. It was the done thing in those parts for the younger siblings to hold off on their marriage plans until the oldest boy had tied the knot, so the announcement of the forthcoming wedding came as a welcomed relief.

After Bryant and my mother got hitched there were marriages left, right and centre as the family suddenly expanded out across the wheatbelt. Amid the hectic harvest season work schedule the brothers of which there were three all chipped in to build new farm houses around the thousand acre property. As it happened the building materials were purchased in bulk consignments which left little room for individual taste. By the time construction was complete there were three new buildings dotted on the landscape which were virtually the same in every way. Even down to the seeds that were dropped into newly hoed flowerbeds, the homesteads were identical in shape and character. To these simple, land dwelling folk it would seem that style takes a well measured second place to practicality and function.

A couple of years before we left Elizabeth Lesley started dating a guy called Corrie who was the son of Dutch immigrants and a friend of our older brother. She was only fourteen and still at school and he was about eighteen and working for an exclusive car firm in Adelaide. They were an inseparable item from the word go and it was assumed by all that they would eventually tie the knot. In the early stages of their relationship my mother didn't trust Corrie to take Lesley out alone so I got to tag along as her chaperone. I was still on my good behaviour bond, so their weekend dates got me out of the house a lot more than my normal quota. Every Saturday night we used to go to the Elizabeth Drive-in movies in Corrie's souped up EH Holden. I knew the dirty bastard wanted to hop in the back seat with my sis the moment the car was hooked up to the speaker so there was always room for negotiation. He was a tight arse when it came to bargaining but I would generally depart from the car with enough cash for a Chiko roll, some chips or a pie and a bottle of Coke. In a surprise move Lesley and Corrie broke it off not long after we moved out to the farm. I suspect his increased fuel bill had something to do with it, but whatever the case she was alone and available. David is Bryant's younger brother by about ten years and they are only separated in looks, dress and character by the years between them.

I don't know if it was true love or weather they just wanted to get all of the marriages out of the way but David and Lesley teamed up and took the plunge along with the rest of them. That would have made my recently appointed step uncle my brother in law at the same time. It also made my, Just a minute.

'AAW!, JUST FORGET IT YA'LL!

With time and the more affluent surroundings my mother's psychological condition improved slightly from what it had been. The much awaited shedding of financial burdens allowed her to go into a reasonably consistent mode of motherly forbearing. She was able to keep up her little act most of the time but rumblings in the community would soon cause the demons to surface. Some circulating rumour among the locals or something one of Bryant's family had said would trigger her wrath and that was it. Exploding in a firestorm of emotional indulgence her true self would come screaming onto the scene as my ideal new mother was cast to the sidelines. By this stage in the game her fits of rage were less frequently directed at me because I had outgrown her by about a foot and I was no longer the sort of smart mouthed teenager a violent mother would want to mess with. I gladly let her know it whenever we were nose to nose in a clash.

I may be an environmental activist these days but before I had heard about 'The Green House Effect' or 'Photo-chemical smog' the smell of motorbike fumes in a pack formation used to give me a hard on. My best mates from among the local farmboys were 'Robert Wilson' and 'Bob Singleton'. They had trail bikes as well and our every spare minute was spent tearing up the pot hole ridden tracks separating our farms. Other young riders would come screaming out of driveways to join us as we passed and it was not unusual to find ourselves scrambling in a pack of ten or fifteen bikes. By sundown on most Friday nights some dusty old crossroad among the pastures would serve as our pre-party meeting ground. Classic vintage saloons and souped up vans, utes and trucks would form a circle around the bikes and we'd plan our fun seeking convoy as we wooed the gathering of farmgirls.



Country dances, drive in movies and rowdy, barnyard piss ups were our normal weekend destinations and scoring that first little virginity deleting root was our all consuming mission. Myself and the two Robert's were the most Alpha lover boys among the crew and most of the other blokes would wait for us to make the first move before they started chatting up the girls. We'd arrive at country dances well after the band had started and it would always be the same dreary scene with shy country bumpkins trying to work up the courage to say hello to a member of the opposite sex. The blokes would be lined up around the walls of the institute building shuffling their feet and feeling inadequate, while the farm girls sat all prim and proper in floral dresses twiddling their thumbs and waiting. The thunderous noise of parking trailbikes and V8 engines would announce our arrival and as we entered the building you could taste the anticipation in the air. Led by myself and the two Robert's the seated wall flowers would be politely escorted from their perches to the dancefloor. The more spirited girls among them were simply picked up by strong young arms and plonked in front of the high, town hall stage. Most of the visiting cabaret bands who played the rural dance circuit would take this as a signal to present their most up tempo tunes. Songs like, ...

'Rockin Robin', ...'Twist and Shout'

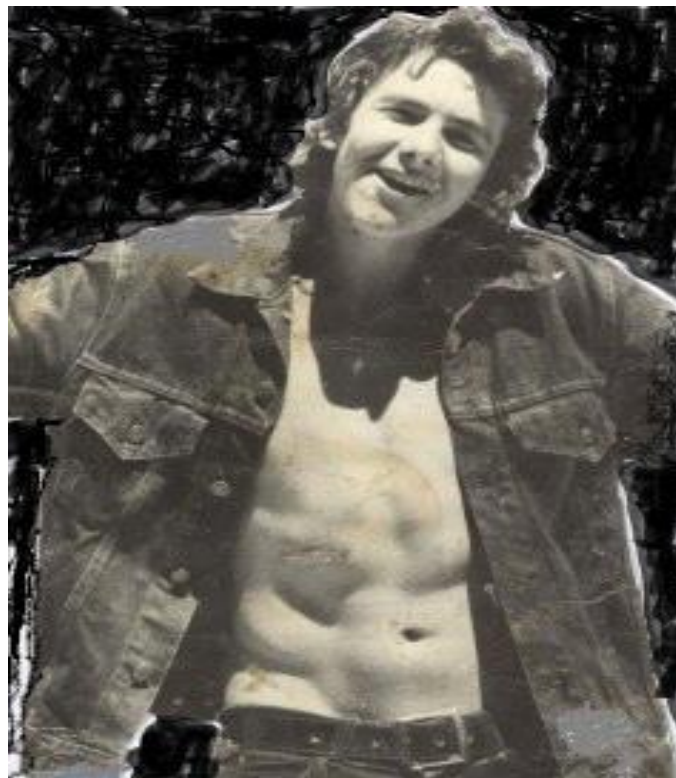
and

'The Flippy. Hippy Shake'



I lost my virginity with Felicity Andrews on a moonlit night, in a stubble paddock, stretched out on the engine cover of a Massey Ferguson harvester. It was a humid and electrical evening, in the school holidays. The crickets were chirping incessantly and swarming mosquitos were biting my naked arse. Across the stubble paddocks we could see the lights of Owen and I could just make out what the band was playing in the front bar of the pub. It was My Dingaling by, ...'Chuck Berry'.

It might sound too romantic to be true but Felicity was the high school beauty Queen and I was the new kid in town. Her ex-boyfriend Snake was a nasty piece of work who couldn't accept the fact she didn't want to go out with him anymore. Snake had been kicked out of high school because of his violent behaviour and he was forever in trouble with the law. In a sinister and menacing way he used to ride his motorbike around the grounds of the school during lunchtime periods in the hope of seeing Felicity. Snake chose a hot and sticky Adelaide plains night to confront us as we were walking arm in arm at the high school continental. This is a chummy little slice of country life that is held in the grounds of the school every summer. There were rides for the kiddies and a big Ferris wheel. Hot dogs, fairy floss and sweet, dripping toffee apples in kids faces. The local community enjoying some good old fashioned family fun at a much loved yearly event.



**YOURS TRULY IN MY MOST COMMON
SCHOOL UNIFORM, AGED FIFTEEN**

I heard my name being called out with an unmistakable sense of urgency and it was a voice that was not known to me, *"Steve, it's Snake and he's got a bottle"*. I sensed an incoming movement and in the corner of my eye I saw the bottle coming down towards my head. Instinctively I jabbed my right elbow backwards and caught the nose of my jealous attacker square on. Felicity screamed and in the confusion of the moment she spilt a chocolate milkshake all over her lovely white party frock. Snake was down and bleeding. Felicity's face looked remarkably similar to that of Laura Dern in *Blue velvet* as her ex-boyfriend hit the dust in a pathetic mess. Chocolate milk had saturated her dress and it became increasingly transparent under the bright fairy lights. A large circle of respectable townsfolk was instantly formed around the blood stained youth on the ground and they started shouting things like, *"Finnish the mongrel off."* and *"Give the bastard what he deserves"*. Snake was the town bully and the blood lusting parents who had formed the circle were sick of him throwing his weight around with their kids. This bloke was not your average redneck tough guy. He was more like the psychopathic street fighters I had encountered back in Elizabeth. He came scrambling back into the circle clutching at peoples collars and shirt sleeves until he was face to face with me and throwing punches. I went in matching him blow for blow until I had him back on his miserable arse where he belonged. The crowd exploded with pure delight. The circle had grown to twice its size by this stage and they were cheering me on with passion filled intensity. I remember thinking, *"It's only seconds until the cops arrive"*. But they were already there. A local constable and his family were looking on from the back of the crowd and he didn't lift a finger to stop the fight. After the last innings I assumed the conflict was over and I was escorting my crying girlfriend away from the scene. It was then that Snake decided to come back for some more impact therapy. He tried to kick me from behind as we were leaving, but the heel of his cowboy boot got caught in a clump of cooch grass and came off. I copped four nails in the back of my thigh and my best Levi's were torn with blood trickling down into an RM Williams riding boot that I had purchased that very day. I stopped being pissed off and became downright infuriated.

I obligingly provided the townsfolk with the spectacle they wanted to see and from that moment on the new kid in town was a hero. I never found out the identity of the guy who gave me the warning about Snake but whoever it was. Thanks anyway pal. The popularity I attained by dropping the town bully opened up a whole new vista of experience for me. My tendency to break into song at the drop of a hat had been the target of ridicule prior to the big fight, but from then on I was actually encouraged by the farmboys to sing their favourite tunes. Mid seventy's teenage anthems like 'Whole Lotta Love', 'Black Night' and 'American Woman'. Happy Days had just become popular on the television and my little wheatbelt community was pretty much the same sort of thing, in real life.

Among my high school friends there were the Richie Cunningham's, Ralph the Mouths and the Potsies. Guiding their kids along the righteous path there were happy and contented folk just like Richies parents. The girls I pursued were squeaky clean and wholesome like the virginal sweethearts in Arnold's Milk Bar and it goes without saying that I was the one most 'Fonzie' like among the group. My trademark tribal greeting soon became the classic, 'Hey!' and my little copycat routine turned into a local craze. Even after I had moved to the city people used to make an embarrassing spectacle of themselves by going, 'Hey!' whenever they spotted me back in town.

Following in Snakes ill fated footsteps I was also expelled from high school for threatening to stick a forthcoming length of cane up the Headmasters rectum. Felicity dropped me soon after this because high school dropouts in her eyes were far from the perfect man. With nothing better to do but blaze the dusty trails on my trailbike with the lads or sit glued to the giggle box my mother became increasingly agitated by my presence around the house. She would nag Bryant constantly to find me a job with one of his, "Snooty nosed friends" and eventually my poor, hen pecked stepfather scored me an apprenticeship at the local newspaper office. In doing so he brought a temporary peace to the homestead and provided my first real glimpse of adult independence. His generous handouts of pocket money had gone a long way in making me popular with the farmgirls but after I started my job at the printing office I became a serious contender on the country dating circuit. The strongest memories I have of the printing office is the smell of country fresh bread filtering through from the bakehouse just next door. That and the horrible sensation of accumulated dust under my fingernails from the ancient letter type racks. It was my task apart from all of the filthy ink cleaning jobs to make up wedding invitations and formal notices. I had to assemble tiny, lead letter blocks to form the words that would later be printed up. It absolutely drove me to distraction and I used to count the moments until it was time to jump on my trailbike and escape. I was spared a life of insufferable boredom and immovable ink stains when my employer suffered a fatal heart attack.

His newly widowed wife attempted to keep the business going but eventually she buckled under the strain and had a nervous breakdown. I was informed by the Editor that my apprenticeship would have to be terminated and it signalled the beginning of a new episode in my life. I hung around on the dole for a few months just chasing the good times with my mates, but I soon found I had more expensive tastes than welfare benefits can satisfy. As usual dependable old Bryant came to the rescue and organised a job for me at the newly established Ingham's chicken farm just up the track from our farm. The job was an absolute bludge and I was given the official title of 'Mortuary Officer'. There were a number of guys working at the chicken farm who were travellers and mostly sought employment during the fruit picking season.

I got to know a couple of drifters among them called 'Stan and Calypso' and they helped to opened my eyes to the world that existed outside of my sleepy little town. Calypso was into Yoga and Tai-chi and as he stood around swapping yarns with the lads he would stretch his entire leg out skyward. Then he would swing his foot back around so that it could touch his ear. All the time he would be standing upright and maintaining a steady, grinning dialogue with the fellas. Stan and Calypso spoke of their travels to places like Indonesia and Malaysia and it was always fun to be around them as they were natural born comedians. I took them to a couple of our country dances on the weekends, but they always seemed outside of the pack. I think this may have been because they were secretly scoffing at our small town ways. I was the only one who really detected it and the other guys thought they were just harmless freaks who knew a shit load of great jokes. As the harvest season came around Stan and Calypso moved on to the Barossa valley to pick grapes and it wasn't long after that before I became sick of bucketing dead chickens. I deliberately got to work late most mornings and slackened off on my duties until I was finally unemployed and free. My time away from the workplace didn't last long however and my next attempt at a meaningful occupation was arranged by my mother. She had been scanning the employment notices from the moment I got the sack. One morning at the breakfast table she went into an unrestrained outburst of glee as she drew a circle around a vacant position. The outside awning manufacturer in Adelaide was promptly phoned on my behalf and an interview was arranged. The boss of the factory must have thought I was a clean living and responsible young fellow when I rolled up with my parents and I was given the job. In her efforts to get me out of her life the old girl also placed a booking on some third rate accommodation not far from the factory. After I was settled into my new low paying job and shit hole of a dwelling, Bryant and my mother hi-tailed it back to the farm in great spirits. There was no doubt they were breathing a sigh of relief at my departure. In a mood of celebration Bryant said he would guarantee a bank loan for the new Suzuki road bike I had been drooling over which brought the final confirmation of my freedom. The single men's quarters my mother had so kindly dumped me in was inhabited by an assortment of working men, those out of work and looking and drunks who had given up trying.

The most intriguing aspect of the place was the fact my favourite Radio DJ 'Leon Byner' was living there as well. He worked at 5KA the most popular Rock station in Adelaide at the time and I couldn't understand how someone of his celebrity status had to live in such a squalid dump. I thought that guys like him were loaded. I made a mental note to scrub Radio DJ from my list of possible worldly achievements. I had to give the greedy old bitch who ran the rooming house a third of my weekly wage and put coins into everything from the gas cooker and showers to the television. I scanned the daily papers in search of slightly more comfortable digs that didn't include rats and cockroaches, but most of the places I checked out were as bad if not worse than the one I was already in.

It wasn't looking promising at all then Bingo! Out of the blue I landed myself a room at one of the most exclusive addresses in Adelaide. Ayers House is a stately bluestone manor situated directly opposite the Royal Adelaide Hospital on North Terrace. It was the colonial homestead of 'Sir Henry Ayers' who is the bloke us white'ie's named Uluhru after. The caretakers of this impressive estate were called Jack and Kitty and they lived in what was the original servants quarters. The pair had advertised for a boarder in the local papers and I was the successful applicant out of six inquiries. Ayers House was restored by the National Trust in a project set up by the Premier Don Dunstan in the mid seventy's. Soon after restoration the swanky old style mansion became a diplomatic party zone for visiting dignitaries like Princess Margaret and The London Philharmonic Orchestra. Whenever there were exclusive functions being held in their honour the front yard would look like a scene from James Bond. There were Rolls Royces and horse drawn carriages lined up around the semi-circular driveway attended by servants dressed in all manor of formal attire. The big iron gates leading onto North Terrace served as a security checkpoint and there were generally enough guards on duty to start frigging a war.

'SO THAT'S WHERE MY HARD EARNED TAX DOLLAR GOES ,... MMMM!'

Jack and Kitty were classic examples of those poor misguided fools who are in awe of the Monarchy. I couldn't work it out because Kitty's family origins were from a part of Ireland 'The troubles' occurred and that lot are supposed to hate the Poms. On one occasion Premier Dunstan brought Princess Anne through Ayers House for a tour of inspection and Kitty got into a real fluster. She made a pot of tea in her best china and went trotting down the stairs in the hope of meeting the Princess.



AYERS HOUSE

Her Royal Highness was being escorted from a white Rolls Royce convertible by the Premier as Kitty arrived with the tea. In the excitement of the moment she tripped on the grass near the old stone fountain and the tray, teapot and biscuits went flying all over the lawn. The Princess and her entourage put their noses in the air and acted as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Jack helped Kitty to her feet and together they gathered up all the broken china. To this day they probably still think that the Royals can do no wrong. 'Poor Kitty' Often on my arrival from the factory I would be stopped at the security barrier and my landlords had to vouch for me. Once cleared I would park my motorbike under my third favourite peppercorn tree in the guests carpark providing there wasn't some official limousine in my spot. Still dressed in my grubby work overalls I would then make my way through the bustle of officialdom up to my thirty dollar a week room. My pad was at the top of some stairs which led down to the central ballroom of the mansion. There were gigantic sparkling chandeliers hanging from the ceiling of the ballroom and I used to turn them on in the evenings as a favour to Jack. I would take as long as possible to complete the task as I explored the grand palace and marvelled at symbols of extreme affluence. The rooms and hallways inside of Ayers House were decorated with antique furniture and paintings from the colonial period that I was told were valued at more than three million dollars. Possibly as an escape from the shackles of a deprived and uncultured past I used to fantasise that I was the filthy rich, talented and charming young gentleman of the manor every time I turned on the lights. In extreme contrast to the world I was born to this place seemed alien and unattainable, yet inviting and alluring at the same time.

An Artists Life

How light and gay an Artists way

without a care from day to day

In heart and pocket light it seems

but always there are dreams.

To dream that fame will come some day

and love is never far away

and he wishes too for himself and you

that his dreams may all come true.

Strauss - Greville.

I can recall the precise moment when it dawned on me that I had escaped the restrictions of childhood and become a fully fledged man. I was laying on my bed one day after work just staring up at the ancient plaster patterns on the ceiling. I wasn't thinking about anything in particular just chilling out to the radio when I heard the song, 'Horror Movie' by 'Skyhooks' for the very first time. It captured the moment so completely because it was wild, untethered and slightly alarming. I was moved in such a way that I became restless and agitated just laying around doing nothing. That night I ventured into my first ever, big city nightclub and danced till the early hours like a stir crazy cowboy. I found out the hard way that suave and sophisticated city girls are a different breed to the farmgirls I knew and they can empty a blokes wallet twice as fast. The name of the club was 'Countdown' on Hindley street and the band that was playing were called 'Kush'. The frontman was a guy by the name of 'Jeff Duff' and as part of his act he was dancing with a life sized, inflatable, sex doll. This wouldn't have seemed too strange in itself but the blow up doll had blood filled syringes injected all over it's body. I awed at the outrageous spectacle under the flashing strobe lights as he filled the room with his immaculate operatic voice. That smoky bar was a million galaxies away from the old country dances at the institute hall and it caused the first wing flutters of the night owl I later became.

More than being mere landlords Jack and Kitty were like the caring and dutiful parents I never had. They even used to provide glasses of beer with the evening meals and Kitty would bring steaming cups of hot chocolate into my room before I went to sleep. She was a great cook who made old fashioned meals like dumplings and pea and ham soup. If I didn't clean the plate of every last molecule she would stand at the kitchen sink with her arms crossed, tapping a wooden spoon on her elbow. Always smiling. My hosts were in their early sixties and they were an odd couple if ever there was one. He was a stodgy Englishman and a grumpy old wretch most of the time, while she was Irish, fun loving and effervescent as a glass of Sal Vital. Jack was a veteran motorcycle enthusiast and it seemed the biggest kick he got was when I pulled up on my bike after work each day. He used to enquire with genuine interest how it had performed in my travels to and from the factory and we would generally have a chat about our favourite bikes until I found an excuse to get up to my room. In Jack's opinion there was never a bike built that could match the classic British Triumph and he would praise their dependability at every opportunity. As well as having an irritable disposition the Lord and master of our household also had a terrible memory. On a number of occasions he repeated the same stories about how he and Kitty used to ride around the English countryside on his BSA Bantam. One evening after dinner we were sitting in the living room watching the ABC News and we started talking about bikes as usual. Jack pulled out a crumpled old photograph of Kitty and himself in younger days as they sat on the old BSA smiling for the camera.

They looked as in love with life as they were with each other and a single tear fell down Jack's cheek as he viewed the old snapshot. That picture meant everything to him and I could see that it offered precious moments of relief from the disappointments of old age. Whenever Kitty spotted Jack getting down in the dumps she would chirp away about nothing in particular and try to lift his spirits. In her spare time she was a Lavender lady at the hospital across the road and trying to make people feel better was her job. Jack would make half hearted attempts to get involved in dinner table conversations that didn't involve bikes, but in the back of his mind you could tell he was thinking, 'Life is not fair'. He never actually said it but I knew he wished he could have his time all over. It's probably fitting that Jack's constant state of despair should make me revel in the importance of my own youth. I was bored to tears by his nostalgic indulgences and I made a private pledge not to waste a moment of my life before it was time to get old and die.

I stayed in contact with the Owen farmboys as best I could, but you know how things are when you are seventeen and ready to take on the world. I met a Greek beauty from the inner city suburb of Gilberton which made weekend trips to the farm few and far between. Anna Maria and I only ever got to jump in the cot a couple of times when I came calling because she had a stern old fashioned Greek mother. Anna lived under the constant threat of being sent back to Athens with a shaved head if her mother ever caught us getting up to any hanky panky. Her old lady was a widow and even though she maintained the restrictive traditional ways, she still engaged in a sexual relationship with one of the local, Greek lover boys called Alexi. If her daughter ever got up to the same caper she was destined to end up bald and deported back to the homeland. Anna was two years older than myself at the time and in my books that made her a nineteen year old woman.

'HYPOCRITICAL OLD BITCH'

Big traditional, family get together's were regular events in Anna's neighbourhood and her old girl used to help out with the cooking. On the two occasions we got to do the dirty deed her mother was preparing food in the house next door. The moment Anna Maria's younger sister went off to play with her girlfriends we were at it like sex crazed hamsters in mating season. On the bedroom wall there were glossy posters of 'The Bay City Rollers', 'ABBA' and 'Sherbet' and as we indulged in the joys of forbidden, young love her bedside radio filled the airwaves with, 'I only have eyes for you' and, 'Go all the way'. After rushed attempts to get dressed Anna and I would re-emerge to find long tables bearing meticulously prepared Grecian delights. The tables were stretched out under vine laden lattice where old men played instruments the likes of which I had never seen. I was welcomed into the clan like one of the family but if they knew what had just taken place in Anna's bedroom I could very well have found myself minus a pair of balls.

My girl was the spectacular young Greek Goddess that all of the other girls adored and they would not perform the 'Zorba' until Anna had initiated the dance. One time a short wrinkled old man came scuttling over to my table after playing his heart out at a names day celebration. He was mumbling something completely unintelligible, as he pointed at me laughing and Anna Maria had to interpret what he was trying to say, ...

"Kan, ... gaa, ... roooo!"

One fine Saturday morning me and my girl rode the hundred mile stretch out to the farm. It was the first time I had introduced her to my family and our brief visit was a tense and uncomfortable affair. I could hear my mother thinking, "What does he see in that little wog bitch?" and she couldn't help passing comment on our age difference. It remained reasonably civil for the remainder of our stay but I was looking for any opportunity to split the scene. The two Roberts finally rolled up on their trailbikes and told us about a get together that was taking place in the afternoon. We all jumped on our bikes and rode out to the Rocks, which is a sandstone gorge separated by a small flowing stream. This picturesque little setting is located between Owen and Balaklava and it's one of the very few landscape features that exists on the otherwise flat terrain. Many of the old crew from high school were at picnic tables by the stream and it felt good to introduce them to Anna. Now all grown up and working most of them just sat around drinking and chatting about our school days. The trailbike enthusiasts among us were into a little more action and it wasn't long before we were trying to out do each other on the steep, crumbling slopes of the gorge. We had only been at it for a short time when Darren Watson came scrambling up the slope shouting. Once he had caught his breath he told us that Snake was drunk and he was throwing large rocks at people in the swimming hole. By this stage all of the other bike riders had gathered around us and turned off their engines. On hearing the news about Snake all of them looked straight at me from behind mischievous grins. We fired up our bikes and rode down to the picnic area where panic stricken swimmers were huddling close to rocks and bushes trying to avoid falling boulders. Snake was at the top of a ten metre sandstone cliff. He was stumbling around trying to pick up the next rock, totally drunk and delirious. The sun was directly behind him as I clawed my way up the slope and I couldn't see the chunks of sandstone he was hurling in my direction. A hefty piece narrowly missed my head as I reached the summit, but I managed to overpower him when he was bending down to pick up another. He was so blind, crying drunk that he could offer little resistance. I pinned his arms to the ground with my knees and it seemed like he was almost relieved that someone had stopped him. I could hear the crew cheering down below as I leaned over him. Then without warning the moment took on a whole new meaning. He started weeping for his mother of all things. I was later to find out from the lads that Snake's old lady was a well known party girl in the pubs of Balaklava and she abandoned him at an early age to run off with some stranger.

Snake was left in the care of his father who was an interstate truck driver and rarely ever at home. Whenever Snake got too drunk and out of control the crying for mummy routine was the most common crescendo to his rage. I actually felt sorry for the guy as we rolled him down the slope to the picnic area. We left him to sleep it off tucked between two hay bales in one of the boys utes, then the old crew drank and laughed till the last flicker of sunlight escaped the southern sky. My laughter was just an intoxicated front to keep the party up and happening with my friends. I was actually quite disturbed by the psycho-dramatic displays of Snake, because it happened less than a week after my biological father had come out to the farm for a visit. I was in the city working at the time and I didn't get to meet him, but my sister Lesley did. Apparently she gave him a cold reception at the front door and told him not to bother coming back. Before he left he said that he wanted to get in touch with his only born son and left a contact address on the mat as the door was slammed in his face. Anna and I arrived at the farmhouse after my parents were asleep and we stayed in the spare room at the end of a long hall. We had to keep our giggling and moaning to a minimum but we got to have the closest thing to fully sanctioned adult sex yet experienced. The following morning we left the house before my mother was awake and rode back into Adelaide. Her own mother was waiting at the front gate and a heated slanging match transpired in the front yard which would have burned the eardrums of anybody listening in. At least now it was out in the open that we were having a sexual relationship. Anna's mother found out the hard way that her daughter didn't feel like having her head shaved and it wasn't long after this my Athenian sweetheart moved away from home.

I went back to work at the factory and forced myself to endure the soul destroying boredom of each slow moving, working week. I guess I just accepted that it was a sacrifice I had to make if I wanted to keep my girl. There were nice Greek boys waiting their chance at every turn and they all had the full support of Anna's mother. Eventually my teenage sweetheart got a place of her own in the city and our relationship blossomed in the sweet flowing nectar of young love.

'WITH OYZO AND DOLMADES,... MMMM'

The unexpected visit by my father nagged at my thoughts for weeks after it happened, so I ventured out to the address he had left with Lesley. On my arrival at his home in Modbury Heights I was greeted at the front door by a much smaller man than myself. He almost poked his nose through the screen when I asked if his name was, "Istvan Jasko". He said it was to which I replied, "So is mine". He opened the door to let me in and I was introduced to his wife and their twelve year old daughter. Annika the half sister I never knew I had was trying out a new pair of roller skates in the front room. My father seemed genuinely glad to see me but it's hard to make a connection amid a barrage of meaningless small talk and chatter.

The new skates seemed to be the most important thing happening and I really wanted to get him on his own so we could talk man to man. We eventually got some precious time alone when he invited me to look at his vegetable garden in the back yard. From the moment I walked into his house an underlining tension began to surface that I couldn't put into words. I knew that I was angry for some unexplainable reason and I could only put it down to the unfavourable character reference my mother had given him through the years. To fast track the conversation away from rhubarbs and turnips and express my percolating agitation I said, "Listen, I want a few straight answers about what has happened in my life and if you try to lie, I'm gonna fucking kill you". Instantly his attention was directed away from the garden plots to my eyes and we stood like that for long moments as he sized up how big a man his bastard son had become. No more evasive small talk was forthcoming as he enquired in a calculating tone, ... "And what exactly is it you would like to know young Istvan? I said, ... "After the police inspected Susan's grave they told my mother it was a Hungarian tradition for the father to exhume his child and kiss them goodbye, if he was not around at the death, Did you dig up my little sisters grave?" His eyes had not left mine throughout the intense questioning and when he replied I knew he was telling the truth. He said that the Adelaide CIB interrogated him about the affair shortly after it happened and they left quite satisfied when he was able to prove he was in Melbourne at the time. I allowed my puffed up and hostile posturing to subside at his explanation and I felt that I had cleared up at least one of my childhood confusions. Up to that point I had been living under the misguided belief that the 'Black magic' story might have been one of the old girls elaborate lies to cover up the fact my father was the actual culprit. I allowed the conversation to drift back to unrelated chatter when my Fathers wife and daughter came out in the garden to join us. I wasn't completely relaxed after our father and son inter-reaction, so I declined an offer to stay for dinner and bid them the most friendly a farewell I could muster. The level of hostility that I had gone to took me by complete surprise and I felt disappointed at my lack of self control. I didn't realise that I had been storing so much anger about Susan's death through the years and standing face to face with my father brought it all haemorrhaging into the open. On my way back into the city I pulled up at a pub near Gepps Cross and downed pints of beer with a couple of abattoir workers that I met in the front bar. They were telling filthy jokes to anyone who would listen and it offered a welcomed escape from my head spinning thoughts and feelings. I got so pissed that I failed to turn up at Anna's flat for a pre-arranged dinner and how I got the bike home is beyond me. I woke up about eleven o'clock the next morning and decided to let the day go it's own sweet way without me. Kitty shed some light on my loud and drunken entry to Ayers House over extra strong cups of coffee and she displayed great understanding when I told her the reason for my intoxicated stupor.

'My name is Sue ... how do you do!'



CHAPTER SIX

TAKE A LEFT TURN OFF THE MORTAL COIL AND THEN GO RIGHT ONTO THE CARNAL PLATFORM

Jesus! I thought I'd seen it all but this one takes the cake. I've just now arrived back home from the mall on the scooter and I'm still shaking from what took place on the road. It's been pissing down on and off all day and it can get bloody dangerous out there on the roads when it's like this. At the best of times I have to navigate through a virtual gauntlet of different hazards and maneuver around an assortment of obstructions, but today beats all. I was away from the shelter of the shops and making my way towards some traffic lights in the hope I might make the pedestrian crossing before it went red. Low and behold there's a delivery van parked halfway out of a driveway right across the pavement, obstructing the footpath and the only way around it was to drive into oncoming traffic on the busy road. There was some inconsiderate dickhead behind the wheel scrutinizing his clip pad and he simply ignored me when I gestured that I had to get through. The next downpour began as I was going off the kerb and onto the road blasting my extremely loud, pocket sized air horn. Through his open window I shouted "Ya! Selfish fucking arsehole" to which the driver side door immediately opened and the stupid cunt came after me. I pulled the speed lever on the bars full stick with one hand and placed my concealed fishing knife into a quick grab position with the other. The road traffic had stopped up the front to let me through and I was gunning it at top speed to get away from the maniac running towards me. The moron managed to kick a rear panel on the scooter before I saw him turn back around in my mirror and the punch happy numbskull was completely oblivious to all the stalled drivers who were watching him. I'll bet you my last brass razoo if I had of sliced his leg open I'd be the one on the wrong end of the law and that deadshit would probably get a warning for attacking a disabled guy on a mobility scooter. I mean really, is this where the world is at? I don't think anything would surprise me now. A while back I heard about some poor, intellectually disabled bastard in a wheelchair who got mugged by teenagers as he was withdrawing his pension money from an ATM. Fucking animals. After this episode I've decided my next creative project is going to be the compilation of a public information video to promote community awareness about the hazards surrounding electric mobility devices. The first issue I think I'll address is the use of god dammed mobile phones by texting and otherwise pre occupied and inattentive pedestrians and drivers.

So now I've got that lot off my chest let's get back to the chapters and we might as well stay on the theme of road travel and all things blood and guts related. The teenage dream I'd been living came to a sudden screeching halt through no fault of my own and how I'd imagined my life would unfold became superseded by a totally different vista of strange and often painful scenarios. I think somewhere among the Twilight Zone'esque real life movie I was living through I stopped being the boy wonder of my youth and became a slightly more world wise man. The flickering rainbows that once danced around the sparkling prisms of my being were gone along with the time extinguished flame of innocence that now glows ever dimmer in the fading embers of my many disappointments. Not that I'm completely embittered just a bit sad that I never got the opportunity to be the optimum version of myself that I could before I die. I'm really sweating on the existence of a hereafter of some kind be it an angel populated and heavenly dimension or the chance to reincarnate as something better than I was in this life. Who knows I might re-emerge somewhere as a guy called Steven Tripp who lives exactly the life I've lived with all the shithouse bits left out.

THEM OLD BLOOD AND BONES

In 1974 while I was living at Ayers House my world was turned upside down by a terrible event that brought my motorbike days skidding to an abrupt end. I had just finished work at the factory and I was riding the new Suzuki back into the city along Payneham Road. As I passed through the fourway intersection of Payneham, Magill, Kensington and North Terrace a car came careering through a red light on my left. I had less than a split second to apply the brakes before we connected. The front disc locked and the rear of the bike swung around smashing into the front of the speeding vehicle. My left leg was sitting between the bikes battery compartment and the metal fender of the car. I was thrown violently from the bike and I landed on my bum facing South. My lower left leg was badly broken and twisted and it was pointing pretty much due North. The white and sinuous joint of my knee was exposed and blood was spurting out like something from a Monty Python movie. The lower leg was laying flat on the bitumen attached to the rest of me by a mere scrap of skin and twitching repulsively like a dying fish. The traffic came to a standstill on all sides of the intersection. A school bus stopped right in front of me and I was confronted with a surreal and disturbing image, as pretty young schoolgirls started vomiting out of the windows. This vision straight from the bowels of hell was replaced by a wall of concerned people who were standing around me in a horrified circle. Voices echoed in a helpless blur of confusion and I was laid down by caring faces, which framed a clear blue, September sky. I heard the words, "This guy's a Nurse" and a young man broke through the wall of people. He knelt down at my side and comforted me briefly while introducing himself as "Fred Steel", "A nurse from the Royal Adelaide Hospital".

Once the formalities were out of the way he sprung into action like one of those guys in the television medical series. The first thing he did was rip off his shirt and tie it tightly around my upper leg. Then he lifted my semi-severed lower leg from the bitumen and arranged it so that it vaguely resembled the right shape. He removed my safety helmet and placed it under the upper leg to further reduce the bleeding, then he commenced to massage the whole limb till his hands were blood red to the elbows. As he attended to me he was also organizing the crowd to call for an ambulance and clear the intersection for when it arrived. He was totally in control of the situation and it offered much needed assurance that more help was on the way. I felt that I was in capable hands but it didn't erase the disturbing thought that I might bleed to death before they could get me to hospital. I would not recommend being fully conscious during ordeals of this kind to anyone. I was desperate for any type of distraction from the moment, so I started chatting to Fred about everything and nothing at the same time. As he massaged my mangled leg I thought of something that might offer an escape from the agony and the absolute horror I was enduring. I asked him if he considered himself "a pretty strong sort of bloke" and he said he thought he was. I asked him if he could knock a man out in one punch and my question was received with raised eyebrows. He said he believed it was within his abilities in a tone which hinted he knew exactly what I was getting at. I asked him if he would do me the honour of punching my lights out and he said that he couldn't because he was a nurse and it was "against the law". My second bright idea came in a flash. At school I had quite a reputation among the lads as a champion arm wrestler and I asked Fred if he would care to oblige. He was hesitant but he agreed to do it when a woman from the crowd offered to continue massaging my leg. Her name was Julia and she announced with a certain air of pride that she had been a nurse during the Vietnam war. In the consciousness jolting intensity of the moment I must have started hallucinating because my good Samaritans were illuminated by dazzling halos of swirling, spiralling rainbows.

*'I felt I was in the presence
of Heaven sent Guardian Angels'*

I was writhing and delirious with pain so I was barely capable of lifting my arm vertically from the bitumen. Fred performed an impressive display of gymnastics until he was stretched out on the road directly facing me. He helped to lock my wrist with his own and we started applying pressure. Fred was about six years older than myself and very fit. I knew he wasn't going to give me any chances by the aggressive nature of his grasp so I gave it my best shot from the word go. We pushed in with great determination and became so preoccupied that it actually came as a surprise when we heard the first beautiful screams of the ambulance coming up North Terrace. My chariot of divine mercy came to a stop as Fred and I continued the arm wrestle and smiled deep into each other's eyes.

Ambulance officers swooped into the circle of concerned onlookers and a quick jab sent me floating out of the pain. Like a windswept feather I surrendered to the numbing embrace of the drug as they strapped me into an ambulance stretcher. I was transported at slightly more than a peak hour crawl to the Royal Adelaide Hospital as blood was being poured into my veins. In a state of shock and delirium I remember looking out the window as we entered the emergency driveway and I saw Kitty standing at the front gates of Ayers House. She was wearing her Lavender lady frock and smoking a ciggie oblivious to my crisis. Her and one of the male attendants were chatting in the sunshine and it was a truly surreal moment knowing that Kitty was completely unaware that the incoming ambulance contained her new border. The large swinging doors of the emergency entrance flew open and I was set upon by a fast moving team of doctors and other medical attendants. The last few moments before I fell blissfully unconscious were charged with urgent efficiency. There was an element of unworldly weirdness about the setting and it was further intensified by the fact I knew the guy who was holding the mask over my face. Kitty's eldest son Andrew worked at the hospital as an Anaesthetist. Prior to this moment we had only ever engaged in brief getting to know you conversations when he came to visit his folks at Ayers House.. Now he was standing over me offering brotherly comfort as he administered the knockout blow. The last thought that crossed my mind as I went under was the fact that Andrew emanated the same luminous glow I had seen radiating from Fred and Julia at the crash scene.

On my return to the brightly lit realms of consciousness I looked down to find that my leg was suspended within a blood filled plastic bag. The observation nurse who was on duty had been waiting for me to open my eyes and the moment I did she was at my bedside. Just like the others she had that same hallucinogenic tinge. As I looked closer I was struck by yet another bizarre coincidence. It was Emma the ex-girlfriend of my brother Dudley. She was the first girl he had ever dated when we were living in Elizabeth. Emma frowned slightly at the mention of Dudley's name. All she really wanted to do was find out if I was allergic to any drugs and take down other personal details. I was still in the grip of shock and chattering away like a two bob watch. Emma intercepted the stream of meaningless verbiage to tell me what had happened while I was out cold. I underwent an initial bone reconstruction operation which had proved a success thus far, but I was still very much on the critical list. All she could tell me apart from that was the fact I was involved in some kind of micro-surgery experiment and the physicians were working out what to do next. The entire leg had been placed in a vacuum bag right up to my crutch and I was being pumped constantly with blood in an attempt to keep it alive. The leg floated around in that plastic bag for five excruciating days and every time I moved it was like a lightening bolt had struck the tattered stump of my knee.

On the morning of the third day I was moved out of intensive care into an orthopaedic ward where I found myself in the company of a number of other battered and broken young men. Many of them had been involved in bike related prangs as well and most had lost a limb in the trauma. I was counting my lucky stars because at least they were trying to save mine. The police came to interview me the day after I was admitted and they informed me that I had been involved in a hit and run accident. **'ACCIDENT!'** How could anybody with half a brain describe a hit and run situation as an

'ACCIDENT?' The two just don't belong together in the same breath. The act of jumping a red light is based on precise and conscious intent and I was expected to be

satisfied with **'ACCIDENT!'** They told me they were hunting for a suspect based on information received at the scene of the crash and all they had to go on was the fact it was a white male driving a red Datsun. The insensitive fuckheads actually made light of my predicament by saying, *"Hey! Even if we don't catch the bastard, you're still gonna clean up on compo"*.

I think the best part of me died that day as I comprehended the spirit crushing fact I had been cheated out of my youth by some unknown and as yet unpunished person. I descended into a black and seething mood. In a withdrawn and unapproachable state I indulged in angry and vengeful imaginings involving myself and the faceless driver of a red speeding car. Just twenty four hours earlier I had been a brave and strapping young champion. Destined for success and unstoppable. I could sing and I could dance like a motherfucker. I could spin a mighty yarn that would have people in stitches and I was so on the frigging ball that no-one could put a trick past me. I was the special one out of the pack who could do anything, be anything and I thought the world was my big fat, juicy oyster. I guess I couldn't have been too sharp after all because didn't see that, 'Spawn of the devil, low life affliction upon humanity' coming through the red light.



Blood on the road

***So at last we meet my would be assassin far better for you if I had died,
Come absorb the pain I have suffered and the countless tears that I have cried.***

I know not your name and I know not your face, only you, know who you are.

September the fourth, nineteen seventy four you left me for dead,

in the tracks of your car

***A hit and run driver in the peak hour traffic, bloodstains on your bumper and tires
a crumpled bike in the rear view mirror beside it a smashed up young man lies
Now perhaps, just a blurred recollection like a poem you may have read somewhere
a distant reminder of something you did for which you showed no remorse or care
Take heed to my words for karma is real and all of us reap from the seeds we sow***

If Hell exists for parting souls then into the furnace your spirit will go

I'll follow you down to the bowels of damnation

and stalk you forever through an endless fire

I wish you well for eternity friend for the hunt is on and I will never tire

In her role as a Lavender lady Kitty was my most regular visitor in the ward and I got more of her time than the other patients because we were buddies. My parents made as many trips as they could down from Owen but as the months dragged on their visits became less frequent. All of a sudden Anna Maria changed from being my hot and sexy, big city girlfriend into something more like a sister or invalid carer. She used to come in and see me on most afternoons and would bring Grecian treats from the restaurant where she worked. Long term patients such as I were granted special privileges and sometimes the nursing staff would let her stay a little longer after visiting hours. I was driven to distraction by the flirtatious antics of the frisky, young nurses, so a little slap and tickle in the evenings went a long way in helping me to remember what it felt like to be normal. Other than zombying out on the bedside telly or following the movements of the better looking nurses there is very little for a young bloke to do in hospital. There's no escape from the god awful clock on the wall as it goes through it's painfully slow cycle from morning till night. As each hour grinds along between the last shot of pethidine and the next the agony increases until the most hardy of thrill seeking, teenage heroes deteriorates into a writhing, moaning wreck. Like every other guy in the ward my main occupation was to count the moments until it was time for another trip into comfortably numb oblivion. My idea of getting out of it prior to my hospital admission was a few beers with the lads on the weekend.

For most of my stay at the Royal Adelaide I was wasted on an alternating cocktail of pethidine, morphine and fortal. It was the most vulnerable and totally useless I have ever felt and sometimes the pain was actually preferable to feeling like a fully conscious corpse. My body was numbed to the bone but my mind was racing like a rocket ship to mars. With nothing to do but endure the pain and curse the trick card life had dealt me my mind became a rumbling steamroller of disconnected thoughts and emotions. Back in the seventy's there was no such thing as trauma counselling for hit and run victims so you just had to rise above the despair somehow or go completely nuts. It's a bloody good job that I am a natural born optimist. As the weeks passed and the shock of the trauma subsided I was able to make sense of the chaotic jabberings in my head. A renewed clarity of thought helped me to recognise positive elements among the misery and high on the list was the fact I had cheated death. With this knowledge I started to embrace a whole new way of looking at the world with 'chance' a key component and survival the golden rule. On the topic of chance it was like I had been swept along in a series of unexplainable coincidence from the moment I hit the bitumen. What are the odds that a couple of qualified nurses might be right at the scene of a smash, right there as it happened?. Then there is the infinitely remote chance of an incoming patient being attended to by the son of his landlady in the emergency room of a large city hospital.

To go out cold in the care of a friend and wake up in the company of another is nothing short of remarkable considering we shared such limited history. To top it all off I had been selected by the fates as a guinea pig in the first ever attempt to reattach a severed limb. The whole chain of events hinted a special psychic connection and I entertained the notion that my rainbow tinted guardian angels were actually 'Alien Health Workers' disguised as everyday medical attendants.

In 1974 the worlds leading micro-surgeons just happened to be Australians and it was lucky for me they were based at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. As the doctors were doing their rounds on the fifth morning of my stay I met one of the surgeons who was going to try to save my leg. His name was George Potter and he said he could offer me "no guarantee that the efforts of he and his colleagues would be a success". After the briefing I gladly signed an official release form which gave them permission to operate further. As I did he stressed the point that they were working in unfamiliar territory and I could lose my leg at any time. He delivered this news with warm sincerity and through the psychedelic swirls of his clean and righteous aura I could tell he was a good man. As he was giving me the details of my situation Doctor Potter leaned in real close over my bed and directed a question which caught me completely off guard. He asked if I knew anything about 'mind over matter' and I said that I had never really thought about it. In a sombre and knowing tone he suggested that I might start thinking about it, because success or failure in the operations ahead may very well depend on a little help from me. After this intriguing little chat with the doctor I was absolutely convinced that my 'Alien Health Worker Theory' was something more than just a sci-fi'ish imagining. I had been selected by the rolling dice of chance and human progress to take part in a ground breaking medical experiment and I was being given clues about my involvement by the other players in a history making event.

'Mind over Matter', ...

'Mmmm!, ... interesting'

I soon learned from Fred's gossip mongering, fellow workers that he wished he was a doctor instead. Who gives a flying fuck if he wished he was a doctor or the king of the whole smoking shitpile? He saved my life and he can be anything he bloody well likes. In the natural course of his profession Fred had been following new developments in micro-surgery with keen interest. He was aware that the surgeons were waiting for the right accident to occur so that they could attempt to save a full limb section and the emergency room were on standby for such an event. When he spotted my newly severed leg flopping around on the roadside Fred must have seen it as a golden opportunity to be part of medical history. Through some administrative wrangling by Doctor Potter, Fred was assigned to my bedside for the first three months of the nine I was on my back.

The good doctor must have reasoned that it would increase the moral of the star patient to have his smash scene savior around the ward. I found out from Fred's constant up dates that the surgeons were counting on their efforts to be a grand success because the reattachment of my leg meant they would be assured further research funding in the next budget. Good on them and half their bloody luck if they can further the noble quest to make artificial limbs a thing of the past. Whenever he got the chance Fred would eavesdrop on the doctors as they were discussing my case and this kept him pretty up to date on how things were going. He used to bring his anatomy books into work for me to browse through and he'd get all excited as he pointed at the intricate diagrams. He described each forthcoming operation in graphic detail with a passion that hinted at how much he wished he could be a surgeon. The illustrations combined with Fred's well informed dialogue had a profound impact on my self perceptions.

Late in the sleepless night I was browsing through Fred's books and exploring the anatomical universe when quite unintentionally I slipped into a new dimension of artistic thought and imagination. A fresh blast of morph kicked in as I was flicking through the pages which somehow transformed the illustrations into detailed ariel maps. Freds verbal descriptions echoed through my head like flight transmissions and the words, "Mind Over Matter" took on critical significance. An exhilarating new sense of purpose came into being as the hospital ward became a transfer station for inner space travel. I was bound to a hospital bed with no outlet to externalize the flood of inspiration so I internalized it in the form of a fully conscious tour of my own anatomy. Base logic told me that the mind can influence the molecular structure of the body and the imagination is a healing tool. Within the space of this thought I found myself sitting upright in the comfort of a space pod recliner and my finger was resting on the trigger of a lazar equipped healing gun. In wonder and fascination I lifted off from the inner surface of my skull and passed through electrical synapse flashes deep within my brain. On my arrival at the tip of the spinal chord I hit the thrusters and ascended down to the pelvic bone where I found a capillary exit. Once in the femoral tendon it was easy navigation to the knee joint where I came to a stop in a vast escarpment of tattered flesh. Before me was a towering canyon of irreparable cells and tissues, veins and arteries. I adjusted the lazar projectors to maximum spread as I banked the space pod towards the damage zone. Covering an area about ten times the size of the space pod I was able to shear away large sections of dead and dying flesh in a relatively short time. My onboard reserve of compressed, life force energies were sprayed with generous abandon all over the injury like a mountain mist on a storm damaged garden. Newly multiplying cells started popping to life before my eyes and I was filled with relief knowing that my mission had been a success. When my work was done I switched the thrusters to hyper drive up through the top of my head and returned to the normality of hospital life".

'MORPHINE EH! '... 'WILD SHIT



Long after the initial shock of the trauma I would find myself breaking into a cold sweat as I comprehended how close I had come to death. The word 'Survival' took on a greater meaning than ever before and I started to ponder the importance of an individual life in the infinite scope of creation. How do human beings differ from ants or bees where the individual holds no real value so the whole might better survive?. The concept of self preservation became so firmly imbedded in my thoughts that I began to imagine what dangers might await me once I was free of the hospital ward. The world outside now appeared like some kind of hostile and unpredictable hazard zone, where one false move can mean instant death. The idea of manoeuvring a car or a motorbike through the urban road system became less attractive as my paranoid imaginings spiralled out of control. Even the act of crossing a city street became a thing to fear. With my growing sense of caution towards all things man made I became anchored in the carnal platform and the realm of essential physical truths. I suppose my brush with death could be compared to the young soldier on the frontline battlefield of war. He has been recruited by some regime or other to fight for a high and mighty ideal and he sees himself as the well trained and invincible man of the moment. The universe is infinite in all directions and waiting to be conquered by him and his platoon of young braves. Then as a stray bullet breaks through his battle weary skin he finds the universe has shrunk to the diameter of the metal slug in his arm.

After a number of extensive micro-surgery operations I received regular skin and bone grafts until the knee had filled out to something of it's former splendour. The skin for the grafts was shaved from my thighs and buttocks like long shreds of bacon and large chunks of bone were excavated out of my pelvis. Six months after I had entered hospital I was hobbling along on crutches and confident enough to take a shower without the aid of a nurse. Bugger!, There's no experience that can quite compare with having your testicles sponged by a buxom wench who would look right at home on the centrefold spread in a girly magazine. The nurses were great fun and easy to share a joke with, but there was also a mean spirited bulldyke matron who treated every bloke in the ward with contempt and loathing. Being slightly more mischievous than the rest I soon became the target of her scorn. When there was a rush on and the ward was short of beds she used to say, ... *"Stick Steven up with the bone cancer patients, He's been here for ages, ... he'll cope"*. After the last of the skin grafts had healed over and the bone was sufficiently calcified I started feeling cautiously more confident that I had beaten my injuries. I even went beyond the normal mode of fatalistic thinking and started believing I might actually get to keep my lower leg. One day during visiting hours Doctor Potter stormed into the ward followed closely by a team of other medical staff. He came to an abrupt stop at the end of my bed and pointing his finger he said, *"That's him"*. All of the visitors were promptly herded out of the room by the nurses and instructions were given to fumigate the ward.

I had contracted a methicillin resistant, staff infection in my leg or the dreaded 'Golden Staph' as it is more commonly known. 'Staphylococcus Aurous'. It kills the very young and the elderly. As my bed was being hastily pushed out of the infected ward I was informed that I was in the age group that can best fight the disease, but it was still a very touch and go situation. I was bundled into a waiting ambulance and carted out to the Northfield Infectious Diseases wards. On my arrival at Northfield Hospital I was placed in a large room at the end of a very long hepatitis ward and there were only two other patients in the room with me. One of them was in a wheelchair and his name was Murray Todd. Murray used to be a truck driver before he became disabled and one day he described how he came to be a paraplegic. He was changing a flat tyre on his rig at the side of the road and a passing motorist hit him. Both his legs were tucked in between the dual wheels of the semi-trailer right up to the base of his spine. As well as the loss of his lower body Murray had contracted the same God awful infection as myself. Even though he was rendered mostly immobile he still maintained a good sense of humour and high spirits. He cracked jokes constantly which helped to drag me out of my morbid and depressing headspace. One of Murray's ex-girlfriends was a nurse in our ward. The old flame had been sparked up prior to my arrival in the ward and they used to engage in hurried late night sessions of horizontal folk dancing. I was as horny as a three balled tomcat in mating season most of the time and the sound effects coming from just over the thin partition were torture beyond belief. In the bed directly opposite me there was an old guy called Dennis. This poor old timer was a passenger in a mini minor that had rolled seven times on the Port Wakefield Road. In the prang he lost both of his legs and an arm. He also sustained severe brain damage which left him rambling incoherently most of the time. Dennis was kept in a child sized, stainless steel crib so that he wouldn't fall out and hurt himself. On the nights approaching a full moon when the lights were turned out in the ward streaks of silvery moonlight filtered down through the high, uncurtained windows directly onto Dennis's bed. His brain damaged chatter used to keep me awake at the best of times but illuminated in this way it was a deathly spectacle. The stumps of his limbs would wave around in the crib like stripped palm trees in a blow and he would repeat the same monotonous chant,

"I'm only half a man, ... I'm only, ... half a man",

Prime Time

Late in the restless hospital night old men frail and eaten to the bone

One starts to moan and then another two more hours till the next shot of peth

Late in the restless hospital night a young man weeps for the world he has lost

Gone are the days of innocent dreams withering souls at the doorway to death

Is this the prime of my youth?

I stayed in the infectious diseases ward for about a month and in this time my lower leg went from it's previous life clinging colour of pale, orangy pink to a sickly purple and blue infected tone. The wounds were swabbed constantly in plain old salt water which is the only available option when antibiotics are of no use. Eventually the usol solution brought salvation to my dying leg and the first tell tale signs of regrowth became evident. After the worst of the infection was gone the doctors said that I had beat it because my age was just inside of the statistical parameters. Secretly I knew that my imagination powered healing gun had played an important part in the process but, I didn't mention it for fear they would send me to the psyche ward. Once free of the staff infection I was returned to the Royal Adelaide to resume my skin graft treatment. Two more months of round the clock attention rolled by in a semi-conscious blur of hospital routine. No more medical complications reared their ugly heads to threaten my progress and I was told by Doctor Potter that my departure from hospital was just around the corner. I had not felt the wind on my face for the best part of a year and I was yearning for liberty like never before. My hospital days eventually drew to a close and I was informed by the nursing staff that I was to be placed on a lighter schedule of medications. From a steady supply of heavy duty pain killers I was reduced to pitiful offerings of Panadine Forte and with it came the most vivid and horrific withdrawals. While squirming in the grip of muscle twisting cramps I would be suddenly transported into nightmarish imaginary situations. I think I was having the same kind of fully conscious dreams experienced by the South American Indians when they blast their brains out with Ayahuacha. During one of the carnal mind trips I found myself down in the concrete mote that surrounds the elephant enclosure at the Adelaide Zoo. There was a big angry bull elephant in the mote and he was trying to whack me with his trunk as I attempted to scramble up the acutely angled side. The whole time I was tucked up safe and sound in my hospital bed, but that didn't do anything to deter the marauding beast that was trying to flatten me. Another horrific episode took place a few days later and it was so severe I had to be given a calming blast of pethidine.

It happened while one of the nurses was massaging my foot and attempting to stimulate the first signs of movement. In the confines of my bed I was rigged up in a complex mechanical traction brace which held my bones together through a series of externalised pins and long steel screws. Where as it had not been there before a long, compressed spring appeared at the side of the splint. It crawled like a stainless steel worm all the way up my body and around the back of my neck. I started shaking uncontrollably as the pressure of the spring caused my head to lean forward towards the leg. The whole metallic splint configuration began to fall apart like a kids toy and my lower leg snapped clean off at the knee joint. The recoiling spring brought it flying up into my mouth with a sickening thud and I couldn't breath for the blood pouring down my throat. Unable to scream all I could do was lay there in gagged mortal terror.

The day I got out of hospital I was so excited that I was up and dressed with the sunrise. I still had four long steiman pins protruding out of a lower leg plaster so my Levi jeans had to be cut and resecured with safety pins. I had lost so much weight since last I had worn them that I had to pull my belt right back to the last hole. Arrangements were in place for my parents to come and pick me up at around lunchtime, so I was just hanging around in the reception area counting the moments and killing time. I was looking forward to life away from hospital but part of me was dreading the thought of returning to the farm. I had little option to do anything else because I was barely capable of walking on crutches, let alone all of the other stuff you have to do to function properly. My mother always made such a big deal about the sacrifices she endured to raise her kids and we were made to feel guilty for the smallest motherly service she performed. I knew it was only her sense of Christian duty that was providing my next bed and not any deep love she might feel for her son.

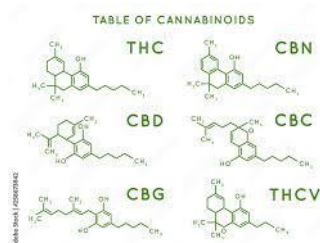
While I was gazing out of the plate glass windows of the reception area someone called my name and I turned around to see Fred stepping out of an elevator. He had just finished his night shift and he was on his way home. I told him that I was being released from hospital and I thanked him for all of his help. He suggested since I had so long to wait for my folks I could do it at his place which was just up the road. I was ready to jump at any opportunity to get away from the hospital so we hailed a cab and headed up North Terrace. Fred's house was a little cottage which was located right across the road from the intersection where I had my smash. As we passed over the crossroad in the cab I noticed a distinctive black stain in the spot where I had fallen and it made my skin crawl. Once inside of Fred's house I was introduced to his younger brother Norm. It was a big day for me and for Norm also it seemed. He had just bought a new 750 Triumph Bonneville and the lads had scored a bag of pot to celebrate. I was quick to let them know I had never smoked marijuana before and Fred replied, *"Compared to the hard shit you've been on man, pot is kids stuff."*

It was the peak of the mid seventies, tacky fashion era and both Fred and his brother looked the part. Norm had platinum blonde hair slicked back in a ducktail and even though it was quite warm outside he didn't remove his black studded leather jacket. Fred looked like one of those characters out of 'Mod Squad' complete with handlebars moustache, boutique permed afro hair do and an outrageous floral body shirt. We were sitting in the small, untidy lounge room of their bachelor pad and a well sculpted joint like a miniature baseball bat was being passed between us. I had my leg up on a kitchen chair and I nearly jumped out of my skin every time the joint passed over it. Both Fred and Norm were seasoned smokers and they were quite creative about the way they cupped the joint between their fingers before taking the next big puff. As could be expected from a novice like myself I coughed my guts out like a dying tractor the moment the smoke hit my throat. My coughing fit was greeted with a red eyed delivery of some dope head wisdom from Norm, "If you don't cough, ... you don't get off baby". Fred and his brother seemed to be sharing a private joke as they choofed away and I sensed that it involved me in some way. Every now and then they would whisper things to each other before cracking up like a pair of naughty chimpanzees. As Fred was exhaling the last possible puff of the joint he said, ... "How does it feel Steve?". I said, "Oh! it's much better now that I've got it up on a chair". "Not your leg dummy, ... your Head". I stopped to think about it for a moment which triggered Fred and his brother to crack up again. I said, "well it's kinda strange, It feels like my brain just melted and I'm really busting to take a crap". The hysterics exploded again. I didn't have the slightest idea what they were on about but that didn't matter. Nothing really did. "So this is what it's like to be stoned, ... Mmmm" Fred stood up out of his chair in a very exaggerated and official kind of way and commenced to address the group. He made a little speech about how today was "my 'Return to Freedom'" and he said we should celebrate the event with a ritual that would allow me to, "Spit in the Eye of Death".

'The marijuana molecules were kissing my brain

like shock waves from an exploding galaxy

I was ready to go along with anything'



I finally twigged what their private joke was and how it involved me when Norm invited me to ride his newly acquired motorcycle around the block. More than a little thrown by the offer I reluctantly agreed in my stoned headspace and they helped me to climb onto the beast with genuine caring gestures. In a mode of extreme caution I eased the Bonney out of the driveway into the flow of traffic. It was the biggest and most difficult to handle bike I had ever ridden, but everything worked ok as long as I took the weight with my right leg. I rode the powerful machine through the intersection and passed directly over the spot where my leg had almost departed my body. The lads were whooping and hollering as I pulled up back in the driveway and they fell about on the sidewalk in fits of stoned laughter. Fred was jumping in the air and shouting at the top of his voice, ...

“It’s a Triumph! ” , ...

“An absolute Triumph!”



CHAPTER SEVEN

'HALF MY BLOODY LUCK'

I've been at it all night yet again carving a seemingly endless stream of words into the cracked screen of this dodgy old laptop that's on it's last legs and destined for the scrap heap. When I first started putting this new draft of together I was able to save my work in the hard drive and then transfer backup copies to a USB stick. That was ok until the god awful thing stopped acknowledging the stick in the port and I could no longer transfer my files. It's tinkering on the brink of being almost unusable but I've worked out that I can copy my work as an attachment and email it to myself then with fingers crossed I can keep working on the master copy in my downloads box. The bomb of a thing will probably die on me mid sentence and I'll have to start using my tiny backup computer which is in an even more sorry state. I think it may be time to invest in a new portable brain so I can complete this book while I'm still on fire with idea's and motivated enough to keep working. My normal daily quota of weed usage has pretty well tripled since I first began writing and to keep the momentum going I'm seriously considering taking a trip down to Kings Cross and seeing if I can hook up with any of the old crew and scoring some speed or cocaine.



'An hour later'

Bang! How's that? In the very moments I was just describing the problems with my terminally ill old laptop the damn thing performed one of it's regular, unexplainable power outages and completely shut down as I was between saves. Luckily I only lost a few sentences temporarily and I was able to rewrite them while they were still fresh in my mind. Check this out! The thing decided to close down immediately after I had just finished typing the words, ... *'The bomb of a thing will probably die on me mid sentence and I'll have to start using my backup computer which is in an even more sorry state'*. Spooky eh? Fuck! Now all I can think about is jumping on the ferry and seeing if I can blow some cash on a gram of coco. Daylight has started creeping into my den from behind the curtains and I'm still fully amped up like a freshly extracted dildo on the topmost setting. As soon as the mall opens up I'll head in to the travel agents and get the ball rolling on my plane tickets and accommodation for the trip. There's a shit load of information I have to give them about my vaccination status and that will probably take ages to complete so while I'm away you can jump into the next chapter and I'll see you when I get back.

MIND EXPANDING ACQUAINTANCES!

After just three days of being back on the farm and dependent on my family I was ready to pull my hair out. Before the smash the rural heartland had been a new and exciting gateway to the world I intended to explore. I was riding high on the power of youthful optimism and each new sunrise offered unexpected delights. I had been swept away on a happy farmkids, adventure and the wheatbelt was my red dirt, teenage playground. I was in the prime of life and I felt like the star in some kind of rags to riches Hollywood dream.

We and my girl on a Saturday night

back seat passion in an old FC

American top forty and Wolf-man Jack

Drive in movies and dripping hamburgers.

A belly full of beer and a head full of stupid dreams

an appointment with destiny who knows where?

Tomorrow ... maybe never.

Time as I was to discover does not stand still in your absence. Things change from what they were and a place that once held such magic can become just another patch of ground where one unexceptional day follows another. In less than twelve months what had been the setting for so much fun and vitality became just another form of painfully dull imprisonment. I sat glued to the telly from morning till night as I had barely enough strength to lift myself out of the chair. I wasn't inspired in the slightest to engage in any creative pursuits and I couldn't shake the nagging thought that the world was passing me by. With the devastation of Darwin by Cyclone Tracy most of the lads went off to work on the massive reconstruction project. Once active and mud splattered trail bikes lay forgotten and gathering dust in farmsheds as disillusioned fathers scratched their heads and sighed. The promise of big money and adventure in the top end had enticed most of their adolescent sons to greener pastures leaving the wheat belt to plod along in it's normal uneventful way. Life in the grip of pain can rob you of the confidence and light hearted abandon that is required to maintain a proper romantic affair. Through my ordeals I had hit an all time emotional low and I was not in a fit state to shower affection on anyone.

Anna Maria made as many trips from the city as she could but her intense dislike of my mother made the much awaited visits rare. Her final stay on the farm ended in a desperate weeping drama which was caused by my blind, stupid temper. So we could be alone for a while we set off to take a stroll among the ripening wheat pastures. One of my crutches got stuck in some weeds among the stubble which caused me to lose my balance and fall. Anna came to my aid as I struggled to get up and I barked at her like a schitzed out madman for the last acceptable time. The fall accentuated the oppressive weight of helplessness I was feeling and I took it out on Anna Maria in a barrage of unintended abuse. The underlining cause for my outburst was nothing to do with her but I had no success in trying to make things right. With little hope of reconciliation between us she kept to herself in the spare bedroom for the remainder of her stay. The next morning she refused a ride from Bryant and walked defiantly into Owen to catch the southbound train. I left it a couple of days before I attempted to make contact ever hopeful she might have got over her huff. Every time I tried to call her number the phone was engaged and when I finally got through I was greeted by the voice of her younger sister Kathy. When the youngster realised it was me on the line she promptly handed the phone to her mother. I received a scathing onslaught in a mix of English and Greek and there was little chance of getting a word in edgeways. She said her daughter never wanted to see me again and not to bother calling in future. I was pleading desperately with her to let me speak with Anna as the phone was slammed down on the hook. In that final moment the harsh reality set in that I had fucked up big time through my out of control temper. An act of unbridled rage had scared my Grecian princess away and I was left to deal with the utter loneliness it brought. I made regular train trips from Owen to the Royal Adelaide Hospital and almost three years after my prang the final plaster cast and pins were removed. At last I could slip into my Levi's without having to worry about protruding, stainless steel rods. Still on crutches but growing more independent by the day my strength began to return and I was able to accomplish the basics without the aid of another person. Discarding the final cast helped no end to restore my self esteem and a big bonus was the fact I could get back behind the wheel of a car.

Hanging around the farm was sending me delirious and the front bar of the Owen pub was a far more inviting alternative. In the time I was incapacitated alcohol earned it's place as a trusted allie to help me through recovery. It's the anaesthetic you can pick up across the counter, self administer and then savour to oblivion as you take on a healthy 'who gives a flying fuck' attitude. I had no social life to speak of other than the bar at the local boozer and without the lads around that was about as much fun as a Saturday night in prison.

Quite unannounced and much to my relief the two Robert's blew into town on a three week leave from Darwin. After toiling in the tropical sun for months on end they were as in need of some fun as myself. The local farmgirls had been badly neglected since the crew split up, so in our old haunts we got legless drunk, laid and left for dead at every available opportunity. By the time their hometown escapades had come to a close we were all hungover, penniless broke and restless as caged lions. My buddies eventually left Owen for their new home in the territory and I returned to my well worn position by the idiot box. After the boundless stimulation of hanging out with the lads my long dormant lust for life had been given a healthy kickstart. Within a week of their departure I decided to escape the dull pace of the farm and move back to the city. It was certainly going to be a trip into the great unknown because the only friends I had in Adelaide besides a host of snooping relatives were Jack and Kitty or Fred Steel and his brother. My old room at Ayers House had long since been rented out and besides I didn't really feel like being around old Jack's constant misery gutsing. Fred was my last possible option and he gladly offered up his bumpy old couch until I could find somewhere better. Fred's lounge room offered no privacy and the settee was about as comfortable as old wheatbags, but it was better by far than having to depend on my relations. I needed a whole new range of experience that didn't include family involvement or restrictions. My second smoke of pot was the first thing to happen after I hobbled in Fred's front door. I was in much better spirits than the first time I sampled the devil weed and I found it a lot easier to get into the warped sense of humour of he and his brother. The herb superb was consumed constantly in the time I stayed at the house and as the days turned into weeks I became just another stoned and babbling, big city 'Pot head'. It was a most agreeable initiation into the realms of cannabis elevated consciousness.

For about three and a half years after I got out of hospital I received workers compensation payments from my previous employer. The police report had stated that I was 100% free of blame as I had been hit by a car coming through a red light on my left. The incident took place while I was riding home from work which entitled me to weekly compo payments and a lump sum settlement after the matter was heard in court. I used to go to the factory each week to pick up the compo cheques rather than waiting for them to arrive through the mail and my ex-boss would just leave me standing at the counter while he did the paperwork. The mean old fart wouldn't piss on a man if he was on fire let alone offer a cripple a chair. The superior acting shitstain would have a little winge each week about the fact he had to cough up the money. He acted as if the cash was coming out of his own pocket even after I made mention of reimbursement through the workers compensation scheme. Sometimes I popped out the back to say hi to my old workmates and they were just as preoccupied by my weekly payments as the boss. Quite often they would drop smart arse remarks like, "*Fuck! I'd stick my head in a vice if I didn't have to come to work in this shithole*".

Much to the relief of the boss my weekly compo payments came to an end and I went onto sickness benefits. Then just one week into my new financial arrangement I was informed that I had to become a live in patient at a Government Re-habilitation Centre. The desk official at the Department of Social Security sang great praise of the re-habilitation center that would get me back in, "*Ship shape condition*" and ready to re-enter the workforce. He even had the hide to suggest I would once again be a, "*worthwhile member of the community*". I took his remarks to mean if you are rendered disabled and incapable of working you are no longer considered of any value to society. The insensitive remarks made by that drone were the final straw in making me feel like I had landed on the scrap heap of civilisation. And they wonder why people lose faith in the system. '*Just like ants in a sugarbowl*'. As things turned out my new living arrangements were a blessing in disguise. I'd been feeling that I had overstayed my welcome at Fred's place and an inner city address would be quite convenient. Saint Margaret's Rehabilitation centre became my new place of residence and it was home to a host of displaced but interesting individuals. The majority of them were in wheelchairs or on crutches and other forms of physical support. There were people with brain damage, Saint Vitus dance, epilepsy and any other ailment you care to imagine.

Unified by a host of common afflictions this motley assembly of outcasts cared for and supported each other and they were a good lot to know. At Saint Margaret's I soon fell in with the most hardline of the rebels and trouble makers. These were the ones the strict, draconian Administrator had blacklisted for unruly or unsociable behaviour. The ring leaders of this segregated minority were Graham a university graduate who's throat had been ripped out in a car smash and Nick a gay body builder who had sustained brain damage from a falling gym weight. Then there was Joy the red haired and highly emotional English girl who was studying for a higher school certificate and Trevor, a wheelchair bound intellectual who took pleasure in laughing at his own frailty. Graham was a spooky little urchin who wore really thick bi-focal glasses. They magnified his intense and intelligent eyes to twice their actual size and protruded from his face like television monitors to the soul. Because of the injuries he had received to his throat he spoke in a low and barely audible, forced whisper.

Graham was a button pushing *little jester* who seized every opportunity to nudge at the masks of those around him. On the second day after my arrival at the centre he walked right up close and put his face in mine. In a highly theatrical manner and for all to hear, he hit me with a question that demanded a reply. "*Is your name 'really', Steven Trip?*" Caught completely off guard I became defensive and informed him that it was, but the correct spelling was with a double 'P'. I elaborated further to let him know my high school nickname was 'TRIPPPA' which I preferred to spell with three P's and an 'A' on the end. He had a conceding little chuckle at my quick response but he was not completely convinced.

He wanted to know the in's and out's of my family history so as to narrow down the details of how I got that name. It seemed ridiculous that he was placing so much importance on my given title so I just laughed it off. At that stage in the game I could blurt out most of the hip pot head jargon of the day but I was yet to venture into the 'Psycho-tropic playground'. Joy the English girl was well at home among the rebels because of a healthy resistance to the dictates of the Administrator. She would kick up a stink at the smallest infringement of her personal rights and come to the aid of others in need. Joy and I hit it off from the word go and within a month we were lovers. Unknown to anyone Graham had been nurturing a secret crush on Joy which came bubbling to the surface the moment she and I teamed up. From then on Graham started referring to me as, "Mr. Ego-Tripper" but it was always conveyed in the spirit of newly acquired friendship.

Daily I attended excruciating physiotherapy sessions and when they were over I couldn't do much at all but lay down and recover. I had my own pokey, little cubicle as did all of the other patients nestled among a tower of cheaply painted besser blocks. There was hardly enough room to swing a cat and I've seen bigger prison cells. The centre had a fully equipped Art facility which was stocked with high quality materials. When I had enough energy I would indulge to my hearts content and make good use of the free materials. Prolonged sketching sessions produced the framework for surrealistic dreamscapes which were eventually finished in oils. I got into sculpture seriously for the first time in my life in clay, plaster and wood blocks. If ever I made an irreparable mistake with anything I was working on I simply ditched it and started again, happy in the knowledge it wasn't costing me a brass razoo.

Pension days around Saint Margaret's were a cause for celebration for those who were capable of enjoying it. The most risky and mischievous stunt our merry little gang ever pulled off was a cleverly orchestrated piss up at the local Tavern. We conspired like thieves early in the day to meet at the front gate after the ward matron had completed her rounds. What a sorry sight we must have made as we negotiated the uneven sidewalk's to the pub. Nick the Brain damaged body builder was pushing Trevor in his wheel chair and he performed exaggerated muscular displays with the most slight of his kerbside exertions. I had graduated to walking sticks by this stage and my jerky movements closely resembled a newborn giraffe learning how to walk. Saint Vitus dance afflicted Ruby was being assisted by Joy who was the only one among us without a physical impairment. Graham was power walking ahead of the group and getting impatient with our slow progress. Apparently he had to meet some bloke in the front bar. When we finally got to the pub we located a table and started ordering drinks. The most trendy drink of the day was a mixture of three kinds of Cinzano, dry ginger and a twist of lemon. They were called, ... 'NEWKS' after the world beating tennis player.

With each new and dangerously under spaced round we raised our glasses and mimicked the guy on the telly. "BEAUTY NEWK" Graham only hung around for the first round and he was checking his watch the whole time. After a while a real freaky looking guy walked into the bar and just hung in the doorway scanning the room. When Graham and the other bloke spotted each other they went into a truly bizarre routine of talking with their eyes. This was particularly weird coming from Graham as his magnified and highly animated eyeballs rolled around in his head. He got up out of his chair at a contrived pace and walked towards the beer garden following the other guy. I had never been anywhere close to a drug deal in my life and I only caught on when joy explained what was happening. Graham returned a short while later as I was checking out the jukebox with Nick. He walked straight up to me like a steroid charged foot soldier and whispered in a low guttural tone, *"Open your gob Mr. Ego-Tripper we're going on a lovely little holiday"* As I opened my mouth to ask him what he meant he touched my tongue for some strange reason. When he removed his finger from my mouth there was a bitter taste on the end of my tongue. I removed the minute object with the tip of my finger and naively asked him what it was. *"Acid man, Blue Moon, ... Just swallow the friggin thing quick"* I did as he instructed with no idea of what lay ahead. Nick was the next in line for a free trip to who knows where and he did an impressive camp mock orgasm as he consumed the acid. He looked a lot like one of those sexy girls in the ice cream ads. His loud and exaggerated sound effects caught the attention of the barman who bellowed out over the heads of the bar patrons., *"Put a lid on the bloody racket will Ya's!"* I dropped a coin in the slot of the jukebox then we returned to our seats as the room was filled with the sound of David Essex singing,...

'Rock On!'



THE MIND

***THE MIND IS AN INTRICATE MAZE OF ROOMS
WITH INTERCONNECTING DOORS.
DOORS ON ALL THE WALLS AND CEILINGS,
DOORS ON ALL THE FLOORS.
EACH DOOR LEADS TO A NEW DIMENSION
IN WHICH WE STORE OUR THOUGHTS,
AND THE MORE WE SEARCH THE MORE WE DISCOVER
REMEMBERING THE THINGS WE'RE TAUGHT.
IN THE HOUSE OF THE HUMAN MIND
NOT ALL OF THE ROOMS ARE LIT,
THE AREA KNOWN AS SUBCONSCIOUS
IS A DARK FOREBODING PIT.
ONLY THE BRAVE EXPLORE THIS WORLD
PREPARED THAT THEY MIGHT FALL,
THEY'RE GROPING THROUGH THE DARKNESS
FOR THE SWITCH UPON THE WALL.
ONLY A HANDFUL FIND THAT SWITCH
AND WHEN THE LIGHT IS TURNED ON,
THEY SEE IN THE MIDDLE OF THEIR NEW AWARENESS
OLD MISCONCEPTIONS ARE GONE.
IT'S HERE THEY LOOK THEMSELVES IN THE EYE
TO FIND OUT IF THEY ARE FRIENDS,
IN THE ROOMS OF THE MIND WE LIVE ALONE
AND THOSE MIRRORS WILL NEVER END.
THERE'S AN EXIT SIGN ABOVE THE DOOR,
BUT THAT EXIT WON'T SET YOU FREE.
BEYOND THAT DOOR THERE'S ANOTHER DOOR
IN THE MAZE OF INFINITY.***

Shortly after receiving the little paper mood booster I started feeling that something was extremely right as the business suited gathering at the bar were transformed into a swaying huddle of giant insect lava. The mirrored bottle rack before them became a colourful and illuminated mother insect with a thousand protruding, silver nipples. Like the tentacles of a many legged octopus her thirsty offspring scrambled to get their share and the barman turned into Daffy Duck. Daffy appeared to be harvesting corn in a field which sat at the top of a rocky, wave swept cliff.'

'WEIRD MAN'

I turned around at the speed of a wounded snail to find Graham's larger than life eyeballs an inch from my nose and bulging like a couple of newly sprouted puff balls. I think he was speaking to me but it might have been a psychic transmission. Whatever it was I knew he wanted to know if I was enjoying the ride. What came haemorrhaging out of the gaping hole in my head was a slimy and foul tasting ectoplasm of Cinzano, vomit and the tortured attempts at an answer. I was leaning on Nick at the time who had long since surrendered to the sparkling wonders of the jukebox. My reconstituted hospital dinner seriously detracted from the luminescent majesty of the music machine and Nicks reaction at being puked on was over the top. Daffy Duck came fluttering over and kicked us all out as the Dancing Queen by ABBA was filling the smoky airwaves. Our happy little gang left the insects to their feeding frenzy and returned to the centre. Once in the men's dormitory we were packed into Graham's tiny room like a womb full of embryonic monkeys.

Joy and Ruby didn't drop any acid so they had some difficulty in relating to our tripped out antics. There was so little room to move that it came as a welcomed relief when they decided to leave us to it and retire for the night. I had been laying on the bed next to Graham with Joy sitting on my stomach but her constant attempts to get smoochy were blowing my mind. In that highly elevated state the sensation of kissing was like being sucked through a fleshy wet maze inhabited by a dancing sea cucumber. On the departure of the girls Graham, myself, Trevor and Nick switched on to a common psychic frequency and blasted off for the outer limits. Being the demanding little control freak he was Graham insisted that the musical mood for our experience should be his Leonard Cohen collection. He had every album the man ever made and as each new song commenced he gave a muffled yet passionate interpretation of what he thought they meant. Nick was lost in an Asterix comic that he discovered under the bed. Every now and again he would give a little 'Sylvester the Cat' type of chuckle but other than that he was gone. Trevor and Graham were involved in a long intellectual rave that meant absolutely nothing to me.

Trev tried to engage me in the less intricate aspects of the conversation which would always be met by Graham's scorn. *"Cut the friggin small talk you guys"* The only decoration in Graham's room beside a large woven mandala was a colour poster of Janis Joplin straddling a Harley chopper and giving the camera a privately amused 'Big Mamma' smile. My body had long since demoleculized and I was becoming totally immersed in the picture when my view was obstructed by Graham's face.

'DON'T LOOK AT THE PRETTY COLOURS FUCKWIT'

Leonard Cohen sang the night into the morning and Nick eventually conked out on the floor like a beached whale. Graham thought it was hilarious because the rest of us were so zinged up. Trevor gave a detailed account of what was happening inside of Nick's poor brain damaged head, which triggered muted, high pitched screams of delight from Graham. After hours of contributing his wisdom to the collective frenzy Trevor said he wanted to go to bed so he could get back into his book. He was reading a complex instruction manual on how to construct an anti-gravity machine and he maintained it was the way of the future for the physically impaired. Someday he declared with a chuckle, people would be able to fly to the moon in their wheelchairs. Trev used to keep the book in a leather, studded pouch on his chair and it received his undivided attention most of the time. Getting our comrade settled into his cot turned out to be the biggest laugh of the evening. The transition from his wheel chair to the bed was assisted by a hydraulic hoist which quite often seized up without warning. The mechanical arm managed to get him half way there then it cut out with a nasty little hiss. Trevor's frail and shrivelled body was suspended in mid air and he was spinning around slowly like a kid on a swing. He was laughing louder than anyone as we banged away at the connections and tried to free him. When he was finally tucked in with his book he told us that he loved getting stuck mid way in the hoist because it reminded him of happier days before he lost the use of his legs. Leaving Trev to his astrophysical pursuits we said goodnight and wandered off. As I was closing the door Graham grabbed my arm with unnecessary force and said, *"Come with me, ... Goof Ball and keep your gob shut"*. We moved up the dormitory hallway like free floating astronauts and departed through a laundry door into the crisp chill of the approaching dawn. Once outside Graham said, ... *"Don't ride the trip, Tripppa!, let the trip ride you"*. I followed Graham through the floodlit grounds of Saint Margaret's until we came to a stop on the mounds near the hockey field. Like feathers falling from the heavens we came to rest on the neatly trimmed lawn and were silent.

Laying flat on the mound and looking skyward the infinite starscape was shimmering like a million firefly's caught inside a big glass ball. As we surveyed infinity two shooting stars sliced through the night sky at lightening speed. Not a word was spoken. In time a grey and ominous cloud bank came billowing into view and engulfed the stars like a school of krill being swallowed by a gigantic whale. The silence of the dawn was suddenly broken when Graham started chanting the word, **"DESIRE"**

in a repetitive and almost menacing tone. He rolled away from me down the slope of the mound as the first tiny droplets of rain started to fall and it looked like fun so I joined him. We rolled side by side for about thirty feet chanting ...

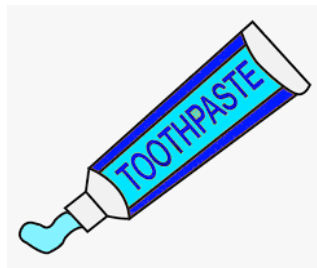
"DESIRE!" ... "DESIRE!"

Then we both jumped up laughing our stupid heads off.

That mad moment was my first attempt at any kind of physical gymnastics since the prang and it felt great. It was probably the same sensation Trevor felt swinging around in his hoist. I was in real pain after my psychedelic excursions, but it felt good to push it a little past my limitations. I stretched a tendon in my knee as a result of our late night theatrics and I had to sit around with the afflicted limb suspended on a cushion for three days. I decided to wait until I was completely healed before I played with any more mind altering substances.

Life at Saint Margaret's was so much like being at school it was scary. The Administrator fit the role of the classic Headmaster from Hell and he would use any excuse to restrict peoples freedom. He actually tried to forbid the romance that was blossoming between Joy and myself saying it was not the centres policy to allow this kind of thing. He was promptly told to fuck off by both Joy and I which earned us a shared position at the top of his black list. It wasn't that easy for the interfering old fart to kick us out however as we were patients in recovery who were diagnosed with a number of physical and psychological problems. One day in the art room while I was up to my elbows in clay the Administrator walked in and pulled up a stool beside my work bench. He tried to come across like some kind of long lost uncle as he informed me that my outstanding works had not gone un-noticed. In a confiding yet calculated tone he said the Director of the of Adelaide School of Fine Arts was one of his old buddies from the university days. They were having the annual entrance examinations in the coming weeks and if it was alright by me he would submit my name for consideration. I was under age by about six months and they weren't taking any more applicants, but in some cases he said with a knowing chuckle, they would make exceptions. I arrived at the Art school only to find the Director was running late for the entrance examinations.

I had been told he was going to assess me personally, so while the other young hopefuls were attacking their practical exam I passed the time by gazing out of a window. After a while a rather cool looking, elderly gentleman rolled into the outdoors carpark on a beat up old BMW motorcycle. He was wearing a beret and a striped sailors shirt with a bright red neck scarf. I remember thinking if this is the Director of the Art school, how did he ever become friends with our anal retentive Administrator. I confirmed it was in fact the Director when he walked into the room looking like he owned the place. The Director and I got straight down to the business of finding out if I was talented enough to enter his Art school. I completed the practical examination in record time to catch up with the others then I was presented a theoretical question sheet. I filled it out as best I could then put it on his desk next to a pile of other sheets. A while later In his assessment the Director said I *"Leaned a little too close to 'Dali'"* and I needed to further examine the theory of art. He said however that I held great promise and if I wanted to enrol at the Art School I was more than welcome. I felt about a million feet tall at having been accepted, but an inner instinct was telling me not to rush in blindly. I was about to tell him I felt my true calling was somehow connected to music as he leaned in close and said, *"Can I be completely honest with you?"*. I was a little taken back but I said, *"Sure, Be my guest"* He said *"Most of the young people who have come here today will end up designing tooth paste packets and the labels on soft drink bottles. Take some friendly advice if you want to be a 'Real Artist, Forget this place, Get out into the real world and do something important"*. I politely thanked the Director for his advice and the invitation to enrol then I hobbled off back to the real world to think of something important to do.



CHAPTER EIGHT

T minus 4... 3...2... 1... Ooops! ... HOUSTON ... WE DON'T HAVE LIFT OFF

I arrived at the closed entrance of the Flight Centre bright and early and through the plate glass windows I could see that the only person in attendance was the same useless twit who had served me a couple of days ago. He was wearing a headset and chatting away with his feet crossed under the table and when he looked in my direction I gave an easy going little wave intended to suggest *'Hi. I'm not sure if you are open yet but here I am'*. Just like that the anal fuckhead tensed up in his chair at lightening speed and gave a really over exaggerated hand signal with a finger pointing skyward which clearly communicated *'Hold it right there I'm on the phone and I'll get to you when I'm finished'*. The last time I saw that kind of hand signal it was given by the Water Police on the Tweed River when I was being pulled over for a breath test at Christmas time. I instantly thought *'This gay arsehole is some ex official dropkick who probably lost his job for being a serial dickwit and now he jumps at every chance he gets to exert his perceived authority on his customers'*. I gave him a little finger signal of my own and then scooted off resolute to do all future travel enquiries on line.

So as it turns out a new variant of the Covid pandemic called the 'Omicron' strain has emerged in South Africa and yet more border closures are imminent in Oz should it penetrate our frontiers and start to cluster up within the Aussie population. My online research has revealed that any travel information I have to submit to the South Australian government must be done at least fourteen days prior to my intended arrival so it's all looking very 'No go' at the moment. If I persevere through all the grief of satisfying the government there's no guarantee I won't land at Adelaide airport and be hit with the news that I have to self quarantine for a further fourteen days due to an outbreak somewhere. It would be really good to hold my dying daughter in my arms once again but with this many obstacles in my way I'm starting to wonder if we may have to just be content with an online video chat until things improve.

Some weird shit is happening around here man. I think that alien might be up to some of his old tricks. The laptop appears to have undergone a remarkable recovery in my absence to the mall. In the last three or so hours I've managed to do a complete read though and touch up edit of all I've written thus far without a single power outage or surprise function failure. Ain't it nice when things are working as they should.

'WELCOME TO ROCK AND ROLL!'

Life at the centre had become such a drag that one sunny spring day Joy and I just walked out with little regard for any consequences that might occur. A short time later each of us was summoned to the Department of Social Security for interviews at which they heard our combined tales of patient abuse and discrimination. Our fortnightly welfare benefits were only continued on the understanding we would register for full time employment with the employment service and that was preferable to living under the dark cloud of institutionalised authority. Joy's sister Ruth and her boyfriend were renting a place at Belair in the Adelaide hills and they said we could use their spare room for a while. It was a fantastic timber bungalow with a pool and an exquisite view of the surrounding countryside. A most romantic setting for the first leg of our affair, away from the restrictions of the centre. Both Ruth and John held straight jobs but when the weekends came around they transformed into veracious, thrill seeking, party animals. The couple shared the house with a most likeable fellow called Big Dave who was a fun loving prankster and a gentle giant if ever there was one. Dave worked for the local shire council as an exterminator of noxious weeds and if by chance he ever stumbled upon the variety you can smoke they were plucked from the ground forthwith and gleefully put to the torch by the crew. Big Dave was a no frills, average Aussie bloke and I liked him a lot. The first time I ever smoked Mullumbimby madness I was stretched out on the front veranda of the house as mostly straight looking party guests were walking through. I was delivering a narrative about how the molecules in my skull were merging with those in the concrete of the porch and I was turning into an extra terrestrial pot plant. I felt a finger in my chest that was hard as a rock and I opened my eyes to see Big Dave's smiling face. There were four of his council workmates standing beside him and with the caring authority of an older brother he said, "Steve, we think that you are a really top bloke, but if we ever find out that you are into smack, we're gonna kick the shit out of you". Dave and the boys helped me up so I was no longer blocking the entrance and Joy stood in the doorway making a noise with her mouth like 'Skippy the bush Kangaroo. Once back inside at the party we were pulled aside by Ruth's boyfriend and offered some purple micro-dots of LSD. Joy was being her normal, hesitant self until her sister came bursting into the room raving about how clean the trips were. We dropped a whole tab each and off we went to 'La La Land'.

Within the hour Joy started showing signs that all was not well. She distanced herself from the mostly extrovert goings on around the place and deteriorated into a withdrawn and weeping wreck. It was here that I discovered she had given up a child for adoption in her early teens and had lived to regret it. She never really recovered from the experience and it was the main reason she was attending the rehabilitation centre. It went a long way in explaining her ability to turn on the waterworks at the drop of a hat. The trip brought all of her maternal regrets flooding to the surface and no amount of comforting helped to stem the tears. One of Ruth's friends was a psyche nurse and when she found out what was happening she came to the rescue. A whole bunch of celery and a bag of carrots were churned up in the blender to give joy a healthy blast of nutrition and fibre. She was then kept occupied by nonsensical but consoling girls club chatter until the effects of the acid eventually subsided. She actually managed to raise a smile when we strolled into the kitchen arm in arm at daybreak. Big Dave was laying on the chequer board linoleum, blowing coloured party streamers up towards the fan on the ceiling. Joy cried and laughed at the same time as she observed, *"He looks like a big kid"*.

'Emotions, Fucking Hell'

After we did the bolt from Saint Margaret's Joy continued her studies through some local night classes. I sensed that my presence was a distraction from her daily learning schedule and I was finding the hills just too bloody tranquil to endure. I started venturing a little further afield to Adelaide's southern coast where I moved into a cliff top shack at Maslin's Beach. Joy stayed in Belair with her sister. The shack was the home and rehearsal space of a young Adelaide band known as 'Station' and they were the star attraction at most of the surf crew parties. The lead singer in the band was a long haired, platinum blond maniac by the name of Peter Wibrow and he was the most outrageous extrovert I have ever had the good fortune to meet. He was fearless in public and would perform his comical antics for whole groups of passing strangers. In shopping malls and the like he would jump on any available plant holder, telephone booth or soft drink machine and command an instant audience. Those who had stopped to observe the stunt would be treated to a high energy song and dance spectacular with a ditty that he was composing as he went along. Most of the spontaneous lyrics he came out with would be mocking the people in the crowd but he did it in such an entertaining way they never really caught on. The moment Peter spotted a mall manager or security guard coming to break up the fun he would be off like a laughing, bouncing jack rabbit. Most of the time the crowds cheered him on as he made his escape and those of us who were with him just had to hang around until he resurfaced. His specialty in pubs and other more adult locations was to pull his cock out for startled but amused patrons. By pinching his foreskin between the thumb and forefinger he would stretch it out as far as it could go and strum it like a guitar.

This would always be accompanied by one of his bawdy ballads and it never failed to win an applause. 'Only in Adelaide, ... Eh! ...folks?' The shack crew were a raggle taggle gathering of surfers, musicians, artists and emerging intellectuals. We used to travel in a convoy of broken down old bombs whenever Station played a gig and we would never make it on time due to some kind of car trouble. The offending vehicle would be promptly abandoned and pushed off the road after the guitars, drums and amplifiers were squeezed into another car. Once at the venue everybody would become an instant roadie to avoid the door charge. Often we made up the entire audience and if the band earned enough to pay for the fuel to get there and home again it was considered a good night. Our weekend rock and roll adventures were fuelled by a cocktail of pot, acid, booze, and the most popular pills of the day which were Pondrax diet suppressants. Mandrax sleeping pills were also highly prized acquisitions and those who had not ended up as a road statistic in their travels would be lined up the following morning at the dunny door. The after effects of the diet pills was acute diarrhoea which would have the whole afflicted clan pleading with whoever was on the toilet to, 'Get the fuck out of there'. I was appointed as the house cook shortly after I moved in which came as the result of a big barbecue I prepared for the crew. That much appreciated pig out earned me an elevated position within the tribe, as I was seen to be attending to the basics and helping to keep the show on the road. I would know when each person had received their dole cheque and they'd be hit with a bill for their weekly rations before they blew it all on drugs. I had them under strict instructions not to start popping pills until after they had eaten but my orders were always ignored. If I had cooked a big meal before one of the weekend shows I would make them all sit down to eat in the front room. Side by side on the upper and lower levels of smelly bunk beds they had to force feed each other with spoonful's of steaming soup. The theatrical little ritual that was performed with each mouthful was a teen tribe chorus of, "Aeroplane time". I stayed in the shack with the Station crew for about two months then the place fell apart due to a backlog of unpaid rent. I won't even name the thieving bastard who was supposed to be attending to it because he doesn't deserve the notoriety. The scheming rat told the crew that we were all paid up as he assured the real estate agent the money was on it's way. The whole time he was partying our cash away in the nightclubs of Adelaide and I imagine this is where he first acquired a taste for smack. We should have seen it coming a mile away but the physical symptoms of heroin were much the same as those produced by the pills.

Joy eventually completed her studies and received a long awaited higher school certificate. This made the regular stress attacks less frequent and it freed her up to do other things. She too had started craving a change from the slow pace of the hills and I was without a home so we decided to rent a flat together. The place we ended up getting was a one bedroom kitchenette, in a charming old bluestone building in North Adelaide. It was located right next door to the British Hotel in Finnis street.

On any given Friday night this is where businessmen and other straight world representatives would rub shoulders with university students and hippies. They in turn were mixing it with an assortment of aboriginals, artists, muso's and writers. The whole business and culture driven melting pot getting loose and intoxicated together, as the beer garden bopped to a host of fantastic bands. At every available opportunity we dined on big juicy steaks, hot off the barbie and we saw the creme of the local talent absolutely free of charge. To celebrate the end of Joy's studies and our wonderful new home we went to an ACDC concert in Memorial Drive. We gave the dancing thing a bit of a go right in front of the stage as the Ted Mulry Gang were playing but I almost got bowled over by the mass of screaming kids. We made it back to our seats in the stand just as ACDC hit the stage. I managed to rest my leg on the seat in front but the punters were dancing in the aisles and the thought of getting hit by some falling lout meant I couldn't really enjoy the show. That familiar feeling of uselessness and frustration set in and I found myself getting angrier than I had been in some time. It was compounded by the intensity of the moment as the crowd frenzied and Bon Scott bellowed out raw and provocative words of rebellion. As I watched that mad Scotsman strutting his stuff I was hit by the sudden revelation that he wasn't singing any notes I couldn't reach myself. Then like a shift in the cold breeze of hopelessness my anger started to subside and I was touched by a new sense of self worth. Some smouldering ember of positivity had reignited and it told me that I could still achieve my dream. I turned to Joy and choking up I said, *"I'm gonna do that myself one day"*. A tear escaped from under my sunglasses and the next thing I knew we were hugging each other and crying like babies among the sweat, the beer cans and the noise. My moment of artistic revelation was followed by actual physical and psychological changes which were akin to the imaginary healing gun experience I had in hospital. I was being driven by a greater positivity than I had ever known and the leg started improving by the day. I found that I could push the pain barrier a little further with everything I did and each new physical challenge just made me stronger. 'Mind over matter' was my inner chant like a long distance runner on the point of collapse. The struggle to overcome my disability was fuelled by the knowledge that I had been to the doorway of death and I had returned to claim victory over my handicap.

There was a guy living across the hall from our flat called Steve White and in time we became good mates. At every chance Steve and I used to go snorkel diving along the southern coast in his beat up Holden station wagon. The spear fishing thing was great therapy to strengthen my leg and after just a few months the limp almost disappeared. I had devised a clever new way of moving my body around and before long I found that I no longer needed to use a walking stick. My lower leg had been reattached just below the knee in the same area they place an artificial limb so I used it like a plastic leg.

By taking most of my body weight with the right leg and then throwing my left foot forward I was able to establish a less painful and more even rhythm. After the first month of relearning how to walk I could keep up with Joy in a cautious but mostly unbroken stride.

Steve worked at the Coke-Cola factory in Thebarton. He was a qualified class six public servant but he said that his job at the Coke depot was a more sane option than the pretentious bullshit of a government bureaucracy. Steve left university in the early seventy's with an impressive list of credits and dived headlong into the workings of the conservative world. He soon found himself tagged as a rebel within the system and he was met with conflict at every turn. Eventually he dropped out of public service life and became an inner city intellectual, come hedonistic funster. Many a hot, North Adelaide summers evening was spent getting out of it on the elegantly latticed veranda at the front of Steve's flat. With candles burning and wild music filtering through his open window we would raise our glasses to freedom and scoff at the more conformist patrons of the British. Beside his easy chair Steve always kept a high powered floodlight which was reserved for those who got too rowdy after closing time. He would switch the light on and point it right in their faces as they staggered past our fence. This glaring affront to their pedestrianism would be accompanied by his favourite little chant, ...

"DENY YOUR EXISTENCE!, ... "DENY YOUR EXISTENCE!"

Steve was an obsessive sci-fi freak and he found a budding new recruit to the genre in me. When he was all choofed up on buds or hash he would deliver all encapsulating summaries of the many books he had read. His story outlines were so precise that I felt like I didn't need to bother reading the books to know what they were all about. His favourite type of sci-fi tales were ones that involved any kind of futuristic projections for humanity. Anything about space travel or computer technology advancements always got his psychic juices flowing and he firmly maintained that homo sapiens were evolved into being to fertilise the cosmos with consciousness. One night without telling Joy or I where we were going Steve bundled us into his old EH station wagon and drove out to the southern beaches. We arrived at a drive in movie and as he hooked up the speaker to the car he informed us that we were there to behold the majesty of Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece 2001 A Space Odyssey. Steve had spoken about the film on a number of occasions but I had no idea it would be such a mind blower. By the time the cavemans bone become a wide angle shot of the space station the acid we had dropped kicked in. We were hurtled down that long, psychedelic tunnel into the core of the black monolith well in advance of Dave the astronaut.



At one of our high flying front balcony raves Steve handed me a copy of 'The Magus' by John Fowle's and he insisted that I take my time to read it. He said it would help me to see through the game of life and the bullshit masks that people wear. Much like Graham at Saint Margaret's my newly befriended neighbour had focussed on my reserves of self confidence as something worthy of scorn. He said, "Ego" was limiting my access to the subtleties of life and he declared that it was his cosmic function to put me on the right track. With little escape from his influence my view of the world like fine cheese began to mature. The cold war was at it's peak and Steve had me convinced the Russians were going to nuke us in our sleep. At one of our balcony parties as we sat around listening to records he played the American Prayer Album by 'The Doors'. That night Jim Morrison walked straight into my bourbon soaked brain and he was greeted like an old friend.

***"I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN MAN,... BUT I'M GONNA GET MY KICKS
BEFORE THE WHOLE SHITHOUSE GOES UP IN FLAMES,... ALRIGHT",***

Before I met Steve my appreciation of music didn't go much further than the commercial hits coming out of the radio. Among a host of other musical gems he introduced me to the operatic brilliance of 'Jeannie Lewis' and when he said that she was an Aussie girl I wouldn't believe it was true. He went on to tell me how she used to perform on the university campus circuit and that's where he first became aware of her. I felt like getting up out of my chair right there and then so I could track her down and witness that superb voice. I never imagined that music could be so theatrically powerful and the songs of our fantastic 'Queen Diva' showed me where poetry best fits in the unfolding tapestry of music. I was already into Pink Floyd but Steve further broadened my horizons with the albums of Tangerine Dream, Hawkwind and others of that ilk. The Court of The Crimson King saturated my sponge like consciousness and as Jimbo would say, "It hit my head with the cold sudden fury of a divine messenger". In hindsight I have concluded that the album was my call the revolution and In my view nothing that came before or after it's creation has the saying been more applicable.

'The poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'

'Knowledge is a deadly friend, if no-one sets the rules

the fate of all mankind I fear is in, ... the hands of fools'

King Crimson.

In keeping with my pledge to become to be a professional singer I scanned the daily papers and checked the notice boards in all of Adelaide's music shops. I was hoping to find a heavy metal group who were looking for a front man but the ads were mostly for commercial cover bands and cabaret acts. I was looking for something with a bit more balls so I could really extend my voice. Eventually I came upon a 'Singer Wanted' notice for a newly formed Metal Rock band. They were called 'FUSION' and they were into some pretty solid material like Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and Uria Heep.

I attended one of the bands rehearsals which was held in a below ground storage bunker which was mostly filled with empty produce crates at the East end fruit markets. The song list the guys were working with contained some familiar numbers that were not too hard to pull off, so I settled on the most demanding piece in their repertoire. It was the early metal classic, 'Where is your Star?' by 'Richie Blackmores Rainbow'. They seemed impressed by what I came out with and they asked me to stick around so we could go through some more songs. I read most of the lyrics from their stack of sheet music and they got a fairly good idea of what I could do. I helped them with the pack up after the rehearsal and we spoke about how it had gone. They said I had a powerful enough voice to compliment the material they were doing and they asked if I wanted to sit in on another session.

'BINGO DELUXE! AND, YEE FUCKING HAAA!, ... YES!'

I clicked with Dave, Jeff, Stewart and Reese like we wew long lost kindred souls and it wasn't long before we were regular features in each others lives. Saturday afternoons were set aside for our main rehearsals but the lads would often get together during the week as well. None of us had ever performed before a live audience and we were keen to hit the circuit for our very first gig. Literally overnight my singing went from the odd occasions where I broke into song to a regular routine of long and exhausting vocal sessions. For the first couple of weeks I could hardly talk without coughing and I was sucking on butter menthols the whole time. The constant singing was fantastic because I was learning so much about my voice, but I dreaded the times when the music stopped and we had to pack up the gear. After bellowing at the mike for six hours or more my knee generally started to swell and I'd have to sit down to ease the pain. It was ok for about the first two and a half hours which I figured would be long enough to get me through the average length of a gig. The guys must have thought I was a valuable addition to the band because I was exempted from loading the heavy equipment after about the third rehearsal. With this much needed concession I was able to use my energy to invent the right stage posture and the early evolutions of a dance routine. Each song would see me poised in a mike hugging pose with most of the weight on my right leg. From this position of relative comfort I could venture into little head shaking and bum wiggling routines.

That was fine because it was about as much as any of those late seventies' hard rock singers used to do. With a bit of luck and some good acting I might even convince myself that I was an able bodied man. Joy had shared in the special moment where I embraced my calling to be an entertainer. With each new step forward she delighted in my progress and she was a constant source of encouragement. Steve on the other hand scoffed at my newly acquired position in the band. He said that my, "*All consuming ego*" had taken the reins and steered me into a shallow and indulgent maze. I just yawned and chuckled at his observations and got a distinctive buzz of anticipation as he described the hedonistic and self absorbed world to which I would be enslaved. Having never sampled the delights that wealth can bring I was ready to sell my soul to the first buyer for a song. The character played by Kris Kristofferson in 'A Star is Born' was well entrenched in my psyche as the ideal role model and that persona was to become the main disguise by which I related to the world.

Peter Wibrow in all of his outlandish exuberance was a hopeless and insecure manic depressive. After each high energy performance with his band he would come crashing back down to the real world with a miserable thud. He used to stagger into our flat at all hours of the night trying to sort out the demons in his head. Joy and Steve were better at dealing with his emotional complexities than I was and all I could do was try to cheer him up. I had recently acquired a HD Holden automatic which instantly became Peter's free taxi service. He had a tattered list of shrinks and psychic healers, naturopaths, councillors and social workers from which he hoped to gain salvation and I drove him from one therapist to another all over the metropolitan area. He was searching for something that he couldn't name and each unsatisfactory healer was crossed off the list until eventually it fell to pieces in his whimpering, world battered hands. The last time I got railroaded into Peter's mad plans it was to take him to a government social worker on Glen Osmond Road. In his mania and self defeatist lows he had let things deteriorate so far that he even forgot to lodge his dole form. I was just waiting around as usual flicking through magazines when an ad on the community notice board caught my eye. It was promoting a forthcoming Youth Festival and putting out a call for volunteer help. On the list of planned events it included music, so with time to spare I gave the number a call. I was greeted on the phone by the slow rolling voice of a guy who said he was in charge. It sounded like there was a party going on in the background and every now and again he would stop mid conversation for a long choof on whatever it was he was smoking. His name was 'Adrian Haan' and he said that he was organising a two week Youth festival on the banks of the River Torrens. It was happening in association with the Adelaide Festival Theatre, in conjunction with the normal Festival of the Arts. We could hardly hear each other speaking for the din in the background so he invited me to pop over and, "*Check out the scene man*".

The newly constructed theatre had only just opened and the Youth Festival volunteers had the use of the entire lower ground carpark and office area. As I walked down the ramp into the carpark I spied a fully made up and costumed dance ensemble who were rehearsing a planned performance. A tall and very sexy young blonde in a black and golden bumble bee outfit came skating over to where I was standing. She pulled up to a stop after a skilfully executed back wards spin and said, "Are you here to help?" I informed her what I was there for to which she escorted me through the office area to meet Adrian. We came upon a very groovey looking individual who was a bit like Lee Turner my hippy neighbour from Elizabeth. He was sitting back in a brand new office chair like the proverbial king of the merry pranksters. Adrian's long pointed cowboy boots were plonked up high on a brand new office desk and I knew I was in the company of a fellow ratbag. He was trying to put a dab of spit on the end of a badly lit joint as he chatted away intently into the phone. The mouth piece was pinned between his shoulder and his chin and billowing smoke was starting to burn his eyes. A chunk of glowing, smoky ash fell from the joint and it landed between his legs on the plastic cover of the chair. Screaming and laughing at the same time Adrian said, "See ya!" and hung up the phone. Frantically he jumped around the office and patted out the offending embers. He said it was a "Bloody good job the place had not been burned to the ground" or we would all be out of a job. Adrian was speaking in a familiar tone as if he had known me for years and he only zoomed in on my eyes when I said, "I'm here about the music". He replied, "Hey! yea!, hey!, I thought I'd already seen your head, man". Hey!, ... you wanna help out with the music thing man, ... yea!, ... Right, ... My fun loving companions and I have decided that it would be kinda cool to have a couple of bands in among all the other acts". I told him that I knew at least six local bands who would love to be part of the show to which he replied, "Hey! man, Don't get me wrong, You can make it bigger than fucking Woodstock if you want".

'What a Groove!'



we formalised the proceedings with a newly rolled and ignited joint and as we were lighting it up the dancers came tumbling into the office. That energetic and theatrical setting ranks among the highest in which I have ever shared a joint and it hinted at a mode of being that would later become the norm. Adrian escorted me out of the administration area and along the way he stopped at an empty office up the hall. Reaching inside of the doorway he switched on the light and said, "This is your office man". Two sweet young nymphs came walking down the ramp of the carpark as we were emerging into the blazing sun. Adrian summoned them over with a cheeky, "Hey Ladies" and asked them if they were looking for something to do. They said they wanted to be volunteer workers for the festival to which they were promptly assigned as my helpers. When Joy saw the host of sexy young females that would be around me each day she too was quick to come on board. Besides she had far better organisational skills than I did which made her a valuable addition to the job I had taken on. In the weeks that followed we scheduled all of the acts so precisely that every available second was catered for. There were bands begging us for a spot so even if there was a cancellation another act could quickly take it's place. I found I had more muso friends than I could count and my list of bands swelled from six to almost sixty as word of the event was passed around. With only days left until the festival opened it became a full time, all hours gig. My office was a buzzing hub of activity as we canvassed local council and business for support. Traditionally Adelaide people are community project inspired and our every request was granted by those who thought a kids festival was a great idea. The Adelaide City Council donated the use of the Carols By Candlelight stage which we fully decked out with a PA and lights. As well as the PA systems the local music shops provided a virtual army of roadies. By the time of the opening concert it was a proper full scale festival that was running like a well oiled machine. Our concerts were originally intended to take place between other cultural events at the festival but it was soon the case that it happened the other way around. The band thing became so big it started detracting from attendance figures at the main Arts Festival which landed Adrian and I in the shit. We were summoned to the office of the Director to explain our actions and offer a solution to the crisis. The word on the theatre grapevine suggested that the director was a full on stress case so the mind snapping heads we smoked prior to the meeting left him little escape from our collective predatory wit. The way Adrian and I saw things it was absolutely no fault of ours if the administrators were losing money on the more droll aspects of the festival. This information was conveyed in stereo to the poor flustered Director as we negotiated a compromise to benefit all concerned. Through some fast talking phone conversations with the station manager of 5KA I had secured nightly live to air radio broadcasts which put me in direct contact with the kids we were trying to attract.

In the spirit of professional co-operation I agreed to donate a portion of my radio time to the theatre to promote their poorly attended events. As well as the radio spots I also got to promote the gigs on the telly. I did a couple of afternoon kids shows and I also appeared on the weekly, Adelaide segment of Countdown. The last of our problems was attendance figures so after a brief run down of the bands I would go into an animated, mock hoity toity voice as I promoted ballet, violin concerto's and a puppet production of The Magic Pudding. As word of the outdoor concerts spread the crowds became more diverse. From where it had been mainly schoolkids and families at the start, the street people began to enter our midst to add their own brand of colour. At most of the shows there were large groups of Aborigines drinking in circles by the stage and there were bikers leaning on their rigs smoking joints right under the noses of the cops. This was the hay day of Don Dustan's vision for a 'Festival State' and in anything connected to the cultural agenda the police were advised to lay low. I guess the idea behind his thinking was a Festival State would mean increased revenue dollars and it might even get him re-elected at the polls. In any case it was a bold and grandiose vision which set the tempo for the most culture driven state in the land. On each warm, starlit school holiday evening as the concerts commenced in the park a highly suspect little ritual would take place. There was a guy among the volunteer helpers called 'Doctor Spooky Tooth' who's normal attire was a glitter speckled top hat and long suit tails. As the roadies were setting the stage for the opening act Mr. Spooky Tooth would hit the microphone and address the crowd in a comical pot head manner. He informed the audience that he was going down to the "Cigarette Shop" to get some, "Top Shelf Smoking Gear!" and his tophat was thereafter passed around among the circles of partying people. Within the hour enormous five paper joints would be circulating freely and the cops just whistled to the heavens, as they scuttled away past all of our illegally parked cars.



Joy took charge of my stage wardrobe with the main costume being tailored black satin flairs and a matching waistcoat with no shirt underneath it. These were accompanied by very high white platform boots, eye liner and exotic trinkets from her jewellery box. I think our little dress up sessions really helped me to get in touch with the feminine aspects of my personality and that can be of great value when you are trying to compete with the likes of Bowie or Jagger. I knew I was a long way from that kind of notoriety but it was still early days in my imagined rise to glory. Anyway as far as I was concerned I was already the ultimate winner in life's challenges and everything else was just an added bonus. I had metamorphosed from a crumpled, bed ridden wreck into a 'Rock and Roll Shaman' and all I wanted to do was reclaim the youth that time had attempted to steal from me. Towards the end of the festival a young volunteer made allegations to the police that she had been raped by some bikers under the main performance stage.

It was said to have happened during the second to last concert and it took some fierce negotiations to prevent the cops from closing us down for the final show. An increased police presence was felt and the final gig saw the bikers defiantly ride their rigs onto the lawn. The gathering audience had to scramble to safety as about thirty bikes were assembled in formation right at the front of the main stage. Not a single cop made a move because the young girl had confessed earlier in the day that she made the whole thing up. With the tensions now safely below the red line the gig went ahead and my band was billed as the headline act. The most popular groups who had appeared throughout the festival were listed as our support acts which made the Fusion boys feel like superstars. Our final performance was like the cherry on the pie in a successful two week event and our final spot was as polished as any of Adelaide's best. The lads were in better form than they had displayed at any of our other gigs and it's like we had been saving it up for the big crescendo.

The bikers departed Elder park just prior to my band hitting the stage and a full blown, peace festival vibe blessed the inner city Adelaide night. The hippies were the first to start dancing when we hit them with, 'Sweet Child in Time'. This was followed by 'Rainbow Demon' ... 'Smoke on the Water' and 'Where is your Star?' Everyone was up dancing and red faced rookie police got kisses from all the girls. Much to our surprise Steve White turned up and he was in party mode too. He was tugging on a half empty bottle of Cinzano and puffing some Lebanese hash he had scored from Mr. Spooky Tooth. Among the back stage revelry he actually took time out to praise Joy and I for what we had achieved. When Steve discovered that Adrian was my associate organiser it was on for young and old till daylight. Apparently the pair of them had gone to uni together and after their chance reconnection it turned into a barn storming party as they danced like head banging madmen down memory lane.

Joy was more relieved than anyone at the conclusion of the Elder Park shows. The unending stream of sexy young females had certainly taken their toll on my fiery red haired girlfriend so in the days following the last concert I had to work bloody hard to cajole her into a more secure state of being. I heaped praise on her contribution to the festival and it worked like a dream to cheer her up. If the truth were known Joy had a lot more to do with the nuts and bolts side of the gigs but hey!, 'Love should be functional'. We went into a new mode of smoochy, coochyness as my one true love declared that Mr. rock and roll singer was not allowed to get too chummy with the groupies any more.

One week to the day after the festival ended I received a letter from my compensation lawyer. A meeting was arranged shortly after and I signed a waiting release form in his plush, leather and teak trimmed office. An out of court settlement was formalized and I received an exquisitely uplifting cheque for 30,000 bucks which was big money back then. My account balance had been \$23.40 the previous day and it suddenly skyrocketed to five digits. For days after the cheque cleared our flat became an all expenses paid, party zone for everyone we knew. Peter Wibrow and the shack crew were quick to jump on board and the guys in my band became a permanent fixture. Bottles of Jack Danials and bowls of free pot were there for the taking as daylong jam sessions rolled into decadent and uncaring nights. *'Wow!, If this is what it feels like to be a wealthy son of a bitch then count me in.'* Steve was always there at our daily splurges and he kept zooming in on me at my most vulnerable moments with things like, *"See how quickly you can get sucked into the astral filth belt?"* and, *"How are you going to cope when all of the wealth and self glorifying bullshit is gone?"*. Then he would pour himself another slug of free liquor, roll another big fat, complimentary joint and laugh his head off. Joy was not in any mood to complain about the ongoing racket because her every wish had become my instant command. We hit the malls and bought a shitload of new clothes, whereafter we showed them off in the swankiest joints in town. At every opportunity I would get her up on the dancefloor to experiment with the daring new moves I was perfecting for when next I hit the stage. My knee seemed far less prone to swelling the more I used it and I got to the point of quick strutting confidence that I could perform a dazzling tripple spin on a revolving cuban heel. I was only twenty one when I received the compo settlement and I had never been outside of the South Australian border. I guess for any kid growing up in Australia there is little escape from the call to the USA and those 'Yankee Doodle' movies we grew up with were just cleverly contrived tourism promotions. Whatever the case Joy and I decided that it was a place we wanted to explore. We handed in the keys to our cosy love nest and the days leading up to our scheduled departure were spent in an upstairs room at the British. It was just two more nights before we would be jetting off to adventure and the pre-travel anticipation was delightfully excruciating. In the beer garden of the hotel I got speaking to a guy who sounded like a Yank but it turned out that he was actually Canadian. His name was Phil Winston and he was quick to mention that the Canadians are a more civilized breed than those north of the border.

I told him that we were leaving for the States in a couple of days to which he raised his eyebrows and whistled. *"Man, that's some bad real estate to travel in if you don't keep your wits about you"*. On further inquiry he started to rubbish our holiday destination in great detail so I invited him to join us at our table. Phil had hitchhiked across the states a couple of times and the backpacking horror stories he shared had an instant and profound effect. That night over much agonising and debate Joy and I decided we didn't want to be looking over our shoulders at every turn for the next predator, so the following morning we re-booked the tickets for Europe.

Hasta, ... la, ... Vista, ... Baby!'



CHAPTER NINE

EAT MY MEAT



I just did a dumpster dive out the back of the mall and all of the storage compartments on the scooter were so overloaded on the way home that I tripped a circuit breaker on one of the slopes getting here. The freezer and my three fridges are so chock a block full with free food that I've started throwing T bone steaks and whole frozen chickens to a large family of crows who hang around out in the common area near my unit. As I bang away on the keys in the afternoon's I can watch them squabble and fight for the best bits through my surveillance camera. There are a couple of youngsters among them who constantly hassle the adults for food even though there's more than enough to go around. The babies are just at the perfect age to start training so the next step will be trying to get them eating out of my hands. As I was returning home with this latest bounty I decided the smartest thing I can do to avoid wastage is to host a free barbeque for all the local poor people in Manly. With Christmas just around the corner I'll have no trouble reducing my stockpile of tucka and who knows I might be able to recruit some local muso's to provide the entertainment.

For the time being at least I am unable to share any kind of airborne travel story to Adelaide with you so the next chapter on the menu is going to be the one about my holiday to Europe with Joy in the late seventies. It describes what can happen when a young and insatiable hedonist like me gets his hands on a bunch of cash before he has learned how to exercise any kind of restraint.



OFF TO SEE THE WORLD!



Peter Wibrow came out to the Adelaide airport with his guitar to see us off on the connecting flight to Sydney. He was on one of his post performance lows but he still managed to muster a forlorn and soulful version of 'Leaving on a jet plane'. He sang the song so only Joy and I could hear it and the other travellers were spared a pre-flight performance. I guess his sadness stemmed from the fact he was saying goodbye to us, but also he was losing his free taxi service and all of the other trimmings that came with it.

As our aeroplane came into view Peter hugged us like some newly conscripted soldier who was going off to war. Just a few short minutes later we were nestled back in adjustable recliners with chirpy and purposeful flight attendants fussing all around us. The sense of privilege that came with entering the aircraft triggered a spontaneous fantasy where I was a jet setting rock star off on the next leg of a record promoting world tour. I certainly looked the part in my over priced, brand name travelling attire and the pre-flight smoke I had with Peter was nudging the self approval meter ever closer to the point of climax. The padded seats in a plane provide adequate physical comfort but as the trip got underway I discovered a nagging discomfort that no cushion could ever relieve. Here I was in the lap of luxury but I was feeling a strange and unexplainable sense of uneasiness. It extended to a feeling of not belonging and even guilt. It's as if my stupid disadvantaged childhood dreams had suddenly crossed over into my conscious, living reality and I didn't know how to deal with it. I was like a dog thirsty hobo who had gate crashed a party at the higher echelons of the social ladder and they all knew I was an outsider. All thoughts of social and economic inequality were silenced with an almighty jolt as we ascended to the heavens. My little pre take off choof was suddenly reignited and now it was just the raw exhilaration of lift off. On our departure from Sydney I was astounded by the vast expanse of the city and the suburbs. It made Adelaide look so small and it held a majestic charm that said, *"I'm the kind of town where an aspiring young singer might get ahead"*. I made a mental note to base myself in Old Sydney town when we got back from overseas. There must have been a million bands living in that city who were looking for a front man and my fleeting taste of the stage had me itching to do it again.

Our plane was held up for almost eight hours in Bahrain and the only explanation we got was that there was some kind of technical difficulty. It came as a great relief when the Captain's voice came over the speakers lamenting the long delay and we resumed our flight. Back then it was the policy of Qantas to provide free alcohol in the event of this sort of thing happening so Joy and I started hopping into an unending variety of exotic drinks and cocktails. Everybody else had the same idea and it was like we were in a big glitzy pub in the sky. Shortly after take off the speakers clicked into life again and the Captain interrupted our festivities with a definite note of concern in his voice. He instructed the passengers and crew not to be alarmed, but if we cared to look out of the windows we would see eastern fighter jets close to the wing tips of our plane. Nervous apprehension unsettled his words as he explained how critical it was that no photographs be taken. He said they were a 'trigger happy lot' and the flash of a camera might be misinterpreted as shots being fired from our plane. The fighter jets stayed with us for about six edgy minutes then they banked away and were gone.

After more than twenty hours of take offs and landings, stiff necks and countless complimentary drinks we touched down for the final time at London's Heathrow Airport. That's when the booze really hit us. I was jet lagged, drunk and hungover all at the same time and so was Joy. We were ushered into the plastic intestines leading from the plane to the terminal and here we had to face the mundane ordeal of customs and immigration. As we were checking our baggage through customs our snooty nosed attendant was joined by another official. The second man said they would like to give my belongings a more detailed inspection which found Joy and myself detained in a little room off to the side. After our gear had been turned inside out they were noticeably bewildered. They were so certain they had snared a couple of international drug smugglers and when we came up clean they were stumped. Not knowing what to expect on English supermarket shelves I had brought ten packets of Bank rolling tobacco. The seals were all carelessly broken as they fingered through my baccy and they tore open every packet of papers just for good measure. Those dumbfuck, pommy, customs officials offered not a single word of apology for the inconvenience and they were still shaking their stupid heads as we passed through the barriers. I suppose when I stumbled into their section those academy trained robots would have only seen a long haired, hippy wearing expensive threads and that's what triggered their suspicion. In hindsight I can reason it away and laugh as I must have looked like every sniffer dogs dream come true. Once outside of the terminal we jumped into the first cab we spotted and drove straight to the hotel. Joy had arranged advance paid bookings for a luxury suite at the Charles Dickens Hotel in Baker Street. We were extremely shagged out by the flight and we couldn't really enjoy the grandeur of the place, so we just crashed for ten blissful hours. The next morning we were up with the birds and ready to check out Ye old London Town. It was all new to me but quite familiar to Joy.

Before her family migrated to Australia she had travelled Britain and the European continent quite extensively. We taxied around to all of the well trodden postcard locations and received running commentaries from a host of well paid and tipped chatty drivers. Everywhere we went I was greeted by sights and sounds, smells and sensations I had never experienced before and I found after just the second day I'd absorbed more than enough touristy bombardment. Our third and final day in London was spent driving around to an assortment of car yards with the intention of buying a camper van. In the end I settled on a VW camper with a pop up roof and all of the groovy interior fixtures. After finalising the deal with a fat and happy, fast talking salesman we loaded our baggage from the cab into the camper. Before we departed for the open road I tipped the driver a hansom bonus for guiding us through London's caryard district. The cash in my pocket had become like play money and I was 'Sir. Larry Lashout' who was treating the ghosts of a deprived past to the spoils of the capitalist dream. This was the moment I had been waiting for. Joy and I on a quest of discovery in a new country with the European landscape before us. I wanted to explore the whole place back to front but my ultimate destination was Figueras in Spain to the birth place and home of the Master 'Dali'.

Not knowing what lay in store I blindly went along with Joy's plans for a family reunion in the homeland. Her dear old mum had journeyed to England three weeks prior to us and she was staying in the Cotswolds at the original family homestead. Joy's Grandmother lived there in an old stone building that was nearly six hundred years old. As we inched our way along a thin walled and cobbled driveway leading into her Grandma's yard the whole side of the van got badly scratched by large protruding stones and I was still cursing the medieval layout of the place as we trudged up the creaky old stairs to her Nan's abode. On our approach to the front door Joy grabbed me by the arm and said, *"I don't care how pissed off you are, just don't say anything bad about the Queen"*.

"WHERE THE FUCK AM I?"

The door opened into an ancient dwelling and I was bamboozled into a whirlwind of introductions to Joy's waiting relatives. They were simple earthbound creatures who started firing personal questions from the word go. When were Joy and I intending to get married? How many kids did we want? and had Joy thought about moving back home to England? Jesus! It was so claustrophobic I could taste the genetic stock in the air. Joy had booked us in for a two day stay but I was ready to run for the hills after the first bloody hour. The old dairy that Joy's Granny lived in was constructed on top of a long arched tunnel which stood over a cascading stream. Not far away in the path of the water there was a commercial trout farm and baby fish had escaped from their pens to run wild and mature further down the creek.

From the downstairs laundry window I would often spot a flicking tail or a slippery jump so I strolled into the small township of Nailsworth to buy myself a rod. The fishing thing proved a great escape from the pressures of the household and Joy's family reconnection's. I presented the clan with one great catch after another which were cooked and served in a variety of ways. Joy's mother was quick to suggest that I should forget all about, *"This silly Rock and Roll business"* and become a chef instead. Back in Australia Joy's parents had pretty well kept their noses out of our affairs but in the company of the extended family her old lady started putting on the dutiful mother routine. She passed a negative or condescending comment on every conversation that took place between us and her relatives and it got so bloody infuriating that I ended up just shutting my gob and let them get on with it.

As it turned out we spent more than a week hanging around the Cotswolds but it wasn't all bad. Joy had a cousin by the name of Donald who lived just up the cobblestone road from the dairy. Donald was an accomplished guitarist and as far as I was concerned he was the coolest member of the clan. He and his girlfriend shared a pokey and vey smelly council flat with their six cats and a litter of playful kittens. We all huddled around a tiny gas fire and smoked moroccan hash as Donald displayed remarkable skill on his acoustic guitar. The expertise we were treated to was world class and apparently it had not gone un-noticed at the higher levels of the music game. At some stage early in his playing career Donald was invited to join the renowned English group 'Emmerson, Lake and Palmer' and he turned them down. He said that he was quite contented just playing as a hobby and performing the odd gig at the local footy club. I was blown away by the fact he could let a once in a lifetime chance like that slip by with such little regard. As we spoke further he gave a detailed account of why he had not jumped at the offer. According to Don the music industry is a corrupt and manipulative trade in artistic slavery that is driven by greed and vanity and it is controlled by ruthless, thieving scoundrels. I said, *"Yea! so what's new about that?"* to which we all had a semi-stoned chuckle on the barely detectable, low grade hash.

On the Friday night before we were due to depart from the Cotswolds Joy's whole family met for dinner and a few drinks at the Nailsworth football club. There were a number of new faces seated among them at long wooden tables and I was subjected to yet another bout of rapid fire introductions. They were all getting stuck into the booze with their dinner so it was a lot more relaxed than our arrival had been. I don't know if it was good planning or just good luck but Donald's cabaret band were booked to play the gig. They were dressed in seriously outdated, best man type outfits which in those midland backwaters were probably seen as a smart and stylish threads. The bands bad taste in stage gear was soon forgiven as they belted out one great old time singalong favourite after another. From the first note of 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon' until the final encore of 'Sweet Caroline' the clan were up and swinging.

Towards the end of the last set Joy and I were at the bar meeting up with the locals and sampling some of their famous jellied eels. Pint jugs of Tartans beer were being disposed of with Southern comfort chasers when I heard my name being announced from the stage. The moment Donald mentioned the word "Australia" the place exploded in a wall shaking cheer. My back was patted from all sides by a swag of laughing drunks as I stumbled from the bar. I walked up the stairs towards the mike with the tail of a quickly gulped eel protruding from the side of my mouth and it proved a useful prop for my opening address. I gobbled and slurped my way through a comical rendition of, "G'Day, Mm,... Mm, Mmmm, ... Mate!" and the applause that followed almost lifted the roof off of the old footy club. As the crowd was settling down I had a quick browse through Donald's song list.

He tinkled on the strings briefly so we could match our keys, then the band erupted into the filthiest, ball tearing version of 'Get back' by the Beatles I could have asked for. The audience were a bloody rowdy bunch and that particular song was the perfect selection to win them over. Even the Grannies and Grandpa's were up on the dancefloor doing a highland jig. The second song I chose from the list was, ... 'Rhinestone Cowboy' by Glen Campbell. This just happens to be one of my own all time favourites and it presented a great opportunity to throw in a few of the more subtle tones. The crowd was quiet and receptive during the mellow opening verses but they went wild when the all powerful chorus came thundering in. I don't think there was a person in the house who wasn't singing along. This wonderful family oriented gathering was a complete contrast to the punters who had attended the concerts at the festival. I didn't have to act like some kind of high and mighty Rock Star to win their approval and I could just be myself. That beautiful footy club crowd made sense of Donald's musical contentment and it suddenly occurred to me that all a performer really needs is a happy crowd to be fulfilled. After the show Joy's mother hinted that she had actually been impressed by my singing. Up until then she had never seen me perform, other than the odd times I broke into song around the house. I said, "Oh!, does that mean I don't have to spend the rest of my life in a stinking hot kitchen?" to which she reverted to her normally stern demeanour. The following day Joy informed me that we were going to be driving her mother to visit some more relatives. They lived about sixty miles to the North and she suggested that we might stop at a place called Longleate Castle along the way. This mother and daughter conspiracy was getting seriously out of hand. I was still hung over and all I felt like doing was fishing for trout from an easy chair in the back yard. As usual I had to put all of my own plans aside and pamper to the needs of Joy's mother and it was really starting to give me the shits. I didn't even like the woman and I resented having to share my first ever international experience with her.

Longleat Castle is a palatial country estate which was turned into a lion park so that some Lord or other could afford to pay his taxes. We were driving slowly along a bitumen path with lions on all sides and I was inspired to get snapping with the new Nikon camera I had bought for the trip. I pulled the van to the side of the path so the following cars could pass and I got the camera out of the glove compartment. Down the slope in the distance there was a big old male lion reclining in the sunshine with a bunch of young ones wrestling at his feet. I got some great shots as they rolled and tumbled in the dewy grass and I went through almost a whole roll of film in the process. I had turned on the engine and was preparing to rejoin the convoy on the path when the van started sliding in the grass. Before I could get enough traction on the bitumen the rear end started slipping away and we slid down the slope sideways. Two deep furrows were gouged into the wet soil and it was an absolute miracle we didn't roll. We thudded to a startled and somewhat shaken stop with one side of the van resting on a high cyclone wire fence. My first most important task was to get Joy and her mother to calm down so I assured them that the beasts were adequately fed and they would not pose any kind of serious problem. Some of the lions were walking around about forty feet from the van but they didn't seem the slightest bit interested in us. Looking nervously from window to window both Joy and her mother seized the opportunity like the extroverted 'Drama Queens' they are. They bit their nails nervously like a pair of stupid schoolgirls and went through the most likely way the man eating monsters would claw their way into the VW. More amused than anything I started honking the horn at the traffic up on the track and I soon caught the eye of a young guy who was sitting in the top story of a tourist coach. We exchanged an effective visual communication as I waved my arm out of the open window. I gave him a beckoning kind of gesture that said, *"Hey!, ... check out where I have landed"*. There was a look of genuine fear on the face of Joy's mother for the brief moment my window was open and I think it might have been the prettiest sight I saw all day. People started noticing us and kids were waving from cars up on the path. I knew it was only a matter of time before someone came to help but that did nothing to console Joy and her mum. They were up to the scenario where the lions would lift the camper roof with their claws and pluck us out like sardines, when the cavalry came roaring down the hill like a scene from 'Daktari'. A pack of landrovers covered in zebra stripes slid to a stop all around the van and a series of shots were fired into the air to ward off the lions. An elderly Park Ranger attached a steel cable to our front bumper then his young assistant towed us out. The females in the back were expressing their boundless gratitude and relief as we were hauled up the muddy slope. Once back on the track the old lion keeper towed us into the main carpark area. Along the way he stopped near a sign that said, ... 'Stay On The Grass' and he smiled back at me as he pointed at the sign in a mode of amused authority. The little sign pointing ritual the Ranger had performed was just the excuse Joy's mother was looking for.

As we drove away from Longleate she announced that I was an irresponsible lout who never considered the feelings of others and I thought that life was just a big joke. I was self centred and vain to boot and she certainly felt that her daughter could do a lot better. Joy jumped in with her two bobs worth about our little incident, but eventually she calmed down and started talking about other things. The old battle axe just sat brooding and silent in the back until we reached the home of their relatives, then she turned into the most pleasant natured person you could ever want to meet. Yet again I sat through hours of painfully slow family reconnection's and endured the prying questions of people I would never see again. Where was the fun filled holiday I had planned with my girl back in Adelaide? Where was the dusty road to adventure and my meeting with Dali?

WHERE THE FUCK IS ALL MY MONEY GOING?

Joy's mother was returned safely to the clan in Nailsworth as evening shrouded the town in mist. The whole lion park story was recapped over dinner and as expected my detour from the bitumen path was the main feature. Thank Christ we were moving out in the morning. I needed to get Joy and most of all myself away from that family and back on our quest for Spain. With the new day we departed from the Cotswolds amid strained farewells and headed North towards Scotland.

After just a couple of days on the road in the camper Joy and I settled back into our normal shared reality. We were both relieved that the family tensions had dissipated and now we were getting down to the serious business of having fun. A pattern was soon established whereby we spent one night of the week in some swanky roadside villa or motel, one at a hired camping site and the rest at whatever romantic location we might find along the way. With Joy as the navigator and me at the wheel we soon perfected the art of discovering secluded detours that took us far from the beaten track. We drove all over England, Wales and Scotland for about two months just checking out the sights and immersing ourselves in the local vibes and mixing with the local inhabitants in their home territory was seen as a more worthwhile exercise than running around to crowded tourist destinations.

Other than my recent angling exploits my history with fishing had only ever involved holiday attempts with a handline when I was a kid. I became too easily bored if the fish weren't biting and I would usually scoot off to do something else. The trout fishing escapades in the backyard of the dairy had provided a valuable insight into the time honoured discipline of patience and I wanted to explore it further. I have always been such an impatient bastard and through fishing I discovered a doorway which leads to a more mellow and layed back mode of being. Trout populated streams were a feature at most of our British camping spots and as well as the patience thing a stronger hunting instinct than ever started to emerge.

I became quite an accomplished fly fisherman and the little bar fridge in the camper was always stocked up with fresh trout. While in Scotland and parked by a lake eating severely undersized hamburgers we spied two old blokes trying to haul a small wooden boat down to the water. It was stuck in the shallows and not moving so I wandered over to help. The old guys said they were planning to do some night fishing and as is my way I asked if I could go along. They didn't mind in the slightest so with mud up to my knees I raced back to the van for my rod. Joy was glad for some time alone so she could finish reading the final chapters of her Harold Robbins novel. I quickly parked the camper under a tree, grabbed my rod and hi tailed it back to the boat. The fishermen were waiting patiently when I returned with my gear. We rowed for about half a mile on the sunset kissed water and came to a stop at a small inlet on the other side. As we moved along they spoke about life in their little village by the lake. I got to tell them the bare essentials about myself but they seemed much happier when they were running off the most loved of their fishing tales. Once we had stopped by the inlet the conversation turned mostly to angling. In hoarse, Scottish accents they whispered the finer points of fly fishing and other than that we were silent. We stayed in same spot for about three hours and in that time only two good sized trout were caught. I was yet to catch a thing but I was dammed if I was going to let impatience or restlessness get the better of me.

We were coming into the Scottish summer and the heavens were remarkably cloudless and clear. The sun had set over the ridges that bordered the lake and a big full moon was up in the sky. As we waited for the fish to attack our lures, two slow moving clouds drifted in front of the moon and were illuminated with moonlight reflected rainbows. No fish were showing any interest in my dangling hook so my attention was easily distracted by their changing form. One of the clouds was smaller than the other and it occurred to me that they were very similar to the shape of the British Isles. Without making a big issue of it I brought the clouds to the attention of the fishermen. All of a sudden the silence of the lake was shattered. One of the old guys stood up in the boat as if to get a closer look. After the initial excitement they looked up at the stars in wonder and amazement. The clouds dissolved into the night sky leaving it as clear as it had been before. With all interest in fishing now abandoned the old Scotsmen were eager to get back to the village so they could share the vision with their cronies. As we rowed back at top speed they were saying things like, *"He's a Tinker, he sees messages from the fairies"*, ... *"Oooh!, ... have we been treated to some magic tonight?"* The old boys told me that a 'Tinker' is the Sottish word for Gypsy. They asked if I was a descendant of some nomadic tribe to which I had no answer. I didn't know anything of my Hungarian ancestry other than fragments of stories I had heard. There was never any talk of Gypsies and certainly no mention of secret magical powers. Once back in the village we hauled the boat back onto the muddy bank.

Joy had been reading by candlelight and she was just about to fall asleep when I got back to the van. It took some real lovey, dovey persuasion but in the end she agreed to join me and the fishermen down at the local tavern. As we walked in the door 'Jock and Angus' had a group around them and they were eagerly sharing the tale of the two clouds. Our entrance was met with a big cheer and we were promptly welcomed into the fold. On our departure three days later Jock and Angus insisted we have a parting pint at the local which turned as you might expect into a parting few. The farewell revelry seemed like a fitting end to our tour of Britain so as drunk as highland rebels on Scotch whisky we agreed to head for the European continent the following day. With chronic hangovers and exhausted from the trip we arrived in Dover at dusk and from there we caught the motor ferry to France. Learning how to drive on the wrong side of the road was an experience I would sooner forget but our road weary condition made it even worse.

France was charming in many ways but in others it wasn't up to the hype at all. The sense of personal contact we had felt with the British locals was left far behind to be replaced by the detached and slightly superior reserve of the French. I sensed a constant vibe of prejudice against foreigners at hotels, restaurants and the like. It seemed that most of the attendants we dealt with couldn't take their noses out of the air long enough to see where their bread was being buttered and I came to see France as a necessary evil we had to pass through on our way to Spain.

The most entertaining thing that happened during our entire French excursion was a stop we made at a very pricey country inn. Our room overlooked a cobbled courtyard which extended out of a working dairy and the adjoining stables were home to a pair of big old Clydesdales. As we showered and got dressed for dinner the horses were attached to a cart that was being loaded up with large wooden milk barrels. The Frenchmen who were loading the barrels were the kind of true provincial characters you might see in some fine work of art and the old girl who ran the place yelled at them from an upstairs window to stop making so much noise.

'Is it not, how should I say?, Charming, ... eh!, ... Wee!, ...

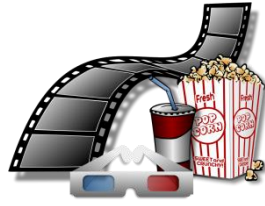
In the evening we sat down to the finest French cuisine we could have wished to sample and the Matron of the Chateau made a grand entrance into the restaurant once all of the guests were seated. Apparently in younger days she was a celebrated French movie starlet and there were once glossy pictures of her on all of the walls. As was her unfortunate habit the poor, old eccentric woman used all of the unsuspecting diners to prop up her aged and faltering ego.

A tape recording of some long forgotten movie theme was played as she floated half shot down the stairs and her bare wrinkled shoulders dripped out of a tight fitting dairy maids outfit. The remnants of her time on the silver screen I should imagine. The layers of makeup on her hail damaged old face gave the appearance of a sad, Pollyanna like clown as she sucked in the restrained applause of her guests. The evening progressed into the midnight hour and the old darling became more and more intoxicated. She was hopping into the cognac like there was no tomorrow and her limited English became a jovial but incomprehensible slur. The older of the workmen who had been loading the milk barrels came in as the staff were preparing to close up and with well seasoned dedication he escorted the very pissed Matron upstairs to her quarters. As we were preparing for bed we heard what sounded like a lovers spat coming from our hostesses abode. Joy and I were still in the early stages of new romance and the theatrics of the old lovebirds was just another part of the fun. We fell asleep to the braying lament of a sex crazed bullock and the rumblings of the cows in their stalls.

With the first hint of daylight we were woken by a God awful racket coming from down in the courtyard. Still half asleep and giggling like naughty children we peeked out through the lace curtains. The elderly farm worker was clutching his boots in his arms and tippy toeing on the cold cobblestones as the Matron bellowed out abuse in French. This was punctuated by clumsy attempts to land a blow on the poor little fellow. In the bitter cold of morning she was only dressed in a flimsy nightgown and the long flowing silk garment was soiled by the dirt on the stones. As she tried to take another swing at her shivering, hen pecked lover she tripped on her nightgown and fell. Our most entertaining image of France was the large and dirt be-smattered arse of our hostess as she was lifted to her feet sobbing.

'Love Eh!, But it is Grand, ... No!'





CHAPTER TEN

JUST LIKE IN THE MOVIES

Dreams! Hell yeah! My vote is yes indeed please for dreams. A very intrusive, red flashing light and a noisy alarm signal from my bladder has just snapped me out of a very lucid experience where I was at the top of a high escarpment with a long smooth slope going down to a large flat area like an expansive salt pan. Matt Damon and his twin brother were cheering me on as I clawed at the outside cockpit roof of a big old commercial air liner that was banking pilotless and of it's own accord ever closer to the edge of the slope. As it listed and began to lean over I did a Jason Bourne'esque bonnet roll and landed on my feet beside them on the tarmac. The three of us watched silently at first as the jet liner rolled down the slope then "*Oh! Yeahs!*" and "*go baby!*" rang out from the twins. Almost at the bottom of the slope the plane caught a sudden thermal gust and lifted away with a powerful yet graceful fluttering of the by now flexible wings then it made a turn and flattened out towards a bright orange and crimson sunset. Following this the three of us were instantly transported in a matrix like reality shift into the library of an old mansion where we continued to laugh and converse about the featherless flight of the airliner. There were others in the library who I somehow recognised from a past experience that involved them, the Damon brothers and myself. That's the point at which I had to get up and go to the toilet as I was again reality shifted from the dream to an almost foetal position on my bed. Wow! Now as I wipe sleep from my eyes and try to stop yawning I am also trying to remember more details from the dream, but's like a nineteen twenties movie that's reached the end of the spool and is flickering to a close. It occurs to me that this is the very first time I have captured a dream in words shortly after waking. I'm thinking my recent increase in vivid lucid dreaming has something to do with the new combination of opiates I've been experimenting with. I've worked out that two 50mg Tramadol slow release capsules taken at the same time with 300mg of Lyrica is better to get me to off sleep than a single Temazapan sleeping tablet. I most often pop them at days end after dinner when I'm watching the news. As a rule I generally wake up after my cat nap about Nine pm or so and I work on the book until daybreak.

Many of the dreams I've been having lately feature now passed on friends like Morty, Elizabeth and Emu but quite often I am visited by well known movie stars and music celebrities as well. We often engage in long, deep conversations and action packed escapades that I'm sure have some meaning among the machinations of my ever active subconscious mind. I'm going to really make an effort from now on to snap myself out of slumber mode so I can capture more of my dreams in words. So by this stage in the game I've successfully managed to turn failure into an art form and I'm pretty much ready for anything the experiential playground can dish up. In any case. Like the naïve fool I was I thought that my quota of bad luck in this life was behind me and I was destined for only happy days in the sunshine, where love and endless enjoyment would follow me on the path to undreamed of achievements and the undying applause of all. Little did I know that the masked and lurking servant of disaster was watching my every movement just waiting his chance to throw crackers on my parade. I was by this stage less guided by impulse and more by the practice of planning my day, but as we succumb to the worldly temptations it's not easy to see the dark places into which we have strayed.

RAISE A GLASS TO DALI!



As we passed through the Spanish frontier out of France the intense heat of summer descended upon the land. Our uncomfortable travelling attire was quickly abandoned for the coolest, bare minimum which meant that we were getting around in our swimmers most of the time. Being the fair skinned and freckled redhead that she is Joy was burned to a crisp within two days regardless of the expensive lotions she used. Our jolly, motoring trek about became an exhausting and temper frayed ordeal which didn't help us at all to resemble the happy smiling faces you see in the travel brochures. With our ladyship in need of some good old fashioned pampering I booked us into a roadside motel with a large pool and a well stocked bar. For three days we just sat out the heatwave in the shade drinking the local brews and relaxing. The heat subsided to a slightly less spirit draining temperature than it had been and Joy's sunburn settled down enough so she could at least move without screaming. From here on most of our road travel took place at night or on cloudy and overcast days to avoid the blistering sun. Christ only knows how much of that timeless, Spanish landscape we missed between destinations. Joy was intent on checking out the larger cities like Barcelona and Madrid and I was bloody relieved to see the last of them. I was happy just camping out in remote locations and fishing the local streams. We spent much of our time laying around in the camper so both of us did a lot of reading. Since my introduction to science fiction with Steve in North Adelaide I had become a full blown Sci-fi addict and I couldn't get enough of it. The exploration of far away and exotic worlds was a perfect compliment to our current reality and as I read away the hours under the Spanish sun my imagination ventured to previously uncharted regions of the inner cosmos. I sketched the Spanish landscape throughout our travels and into the rugged moonlike settings I incorporated alien entities complete with inter-planetary craft. The illustrations I was coming out with were taking on strong surrealistic themes and it wasn't hard to see why Salvador Dali had featured the Spanish terrain so predominantly in his paintings. Many people in Spain will spit on the ground and shout, ... "*Facista's!*" when you mention Dali's name as they are convinced he collaborated with Franco's regime at the peak of their corrupt reign. I couldn't give a rat's ass if he sucked the devil's penis while impregnating the virgin Mary, it was only his skill as a painter and his ongoing campaign of shameless self promotion that I was interested in. The 'ego' as many an eastern philosophy will tell us is the greatest hindrance to true enlightenment, as it distracts the mind from the totality of creation and narrows our perspectives of the world down to the mere sensory pleasures of the self. I just happened to discover the work of Dali at the same time as all that eastern, mystic stuff was first being incorporated into my catalogue of cosmic concepts. I reasoned that Dali had journeyed into the deep abyss of the universal unconscious and returned to the everyday world with an almost photographic record of his expeditions. This seemed to me like a high form of enlightenment in itself and it granted the supreme master every right to be as self aggrandising as he wanted to be. Figueras was our next stop and I could hardly contain my excitement.

Before we left Australia I spoke with a guy in the British Hotel who said that he just missed out on meeting Dali a few years earlier. Apparently the master spoke freely to those who ventured into his museum should it suit his mood at the time. The guy who told me the story said he was being herded out of the gallery at closing time and just before the door was shut for the evening Dali popped his head out of a man sized, Chinese porcelain jar. He waved at the tourists as they departed then popped back down into the jar laughing. It sounded plausible enough but you must always bear in mind that most 'Dali Freaks' have pretty big imagination's of their own. We explored the Museum for a full day and no happy, smiling Salvador Dalis popped up to bid us farewell as we were leaving the building. The trip to Figueras had been a worthwhile exercise over all, but it came as a bit of an annoyance that coins were required to make all of the masters animated sculptures move and more were required to get magnified perspective's on the larger paintings. The aura of mystery surrounding my artistic idol had been seriously depleted by the odour of tacky commercialism and it brought my Dali obsession to a standstill. My main reason for coming to Europe was now achieved and with it's passing all sense of purpose declined. I found I was just blowing my cash as I went through the motions of having an overseas holiday, instead of following through with my own creative ambitions. More often than I let on to Joy I felt like jumping on the nearest plane and flying back to Australia.

Most of our meals from morning to night were enjoyed in cafe's, bars and restaurants. Alcohol was very cheap in Spain back in the seventy's and as was the custom we indulged. We started drinking a lot earlier in the day than was our normal habit and even with breakfast at times. The booze is a lot stronger than is available in Australia and if you don't watch yourself you can end up sloshed by midday. On one such occasion Joy and I were bogged in the camper on a sandy beach in the coastal town of Gandia. There were some Spanish men playing chequers in a thatch roofed hut on the shore so I staggered off through the sand to get some help. The only English speaking person among them said they were willing to assist but they wanted a bottle of anise for their troubles. After the six of them had pushed the van back onto the dirt track I walked their empty bottle into the small township and acquired another without too much fuss. The men insisted that we share the booze with them and they wouldn't take no for an answer. More high powered grog on top of our earlier refreshments had the effect of leaving us completely shitfaced and after dancing arm in arm to 'ABBA' on the radio we had to literally drag ourselves away from those mad, passionate Spaniards. Once back in the van I dropped the keys down between the seats and it took me ages to retrieve them. I should have taken this as a sign that I was too intoxicated to drive and jumped in the back to sleep it off, but when you are that far gone you just don't care. On the gravel track leading away from the beach I went straight through a T junction into a tall patch of cane. We were still laughing like drunken fools as I reversed out of the canefield and got back on the track.

Out on the highway that cuts through Gandia I got stuck behind a fully loaded semi trailer, which was crawling up the hill so slow it was almost going backwards. Thinking it was all clear to go I gunned the engine to overtake the truck and I was only half way past him when the VW engine started straining badly. All of a sudden a taxi came hurtling down the hill towards us and rather than pulling into the wide and clearly marked emergency lane, the driver just threw his arms in the air and started screaming Hail Mary's.

Bang! ... **JESUS!**

My face hit the steering wheel in a nose crushing and eye blackening crunch, then the camper went over sideways and came to a rest on the passenger side. Joy's upper lip was hanging agape and her leg was caught in a tangled mess of crushed metal and rubber. Fuel was dripping dangerously close to the hot exhaust pipe, so as fast as I could I started trying to get her out. I was tugging away at the bent metal with a tyre lever from under the seat when a Spanish motorist pulled over to lend a hand. After the metal was cleared away we still had to pull the leg pretty hard to get it free, but Joy was so pissed and in shock it didn't seem to bother her.

The Spanish guy gestured that we should get, 'Senorita' to 'La clinica, Pronto' and I agreed, so we set about trying to bundle her into his tiny little car. Our good Samaritan drove at top speed in the narrow space between the traffic that had been stopped by the crash. He was beeping the horn frantically and cursing anyone who got in his way. We just missed some people who were getting out of their car to get a better look at the carnage, but he continued on to the clinic in record time. Joy was admitted straight away. She went into immediate surgery which lasted about three hours, then a nurse wheeled her stretcher into the reception area. The nurse spoke only the most basic English but she was able to fill me in on a little of what was happening. Joy's lip had been literally sown back on and six broken teeth were removed. There were no fractures in the leg that had been trapped but it was badly bruised and swollen. I was informed that she would have to stay at the clinic for at least two weeks while her injuries healed. Joy was drugged up to the max so we could only speak briefly before the nurse wheeled her off to a ward. The doctor wanted me to be admitted to the clinic as well but I explained that I couldn't, as I had to secure the van and the rest of our belongings. He was sympathetic to my plight and he agreed to let me go as long as I returned every four hours for a shot of morphine. Are you kidding Doc? Count me in. My two black eyes and swollen head were host to a throbbing headache and my nose was definitely broken. As the first shot of morph saturated my bloodstream I snapped out of the post traumatic aches and pains and clicked into a new mode of physical motivation. I must have looked like something from a Stephen King movie as I left the clinic and hit the streets of Gandia in my elastic nose patch and blood stained shirt.

While the Spanish bloke and I were pulling Joy from the wreckage I spotted my wallet poking out of what was once the glove box, so I slipped it into the back pocket of my shorts. I had about one hundred dollars and some travellers cheques but our passports, bankbooks and everything else were in the van somewhere out on the highway. The most logical thing it seemed was to get back out to the scene of the smash as quick as I could and then contact the local authorities. I was standing on a kerb trying to hail a taxi and not one of the bastards looked like he was interested in taking the fare. I assumed the word must have gone out over the taxi radio that some tourista had smashed into one of their boys and in my blood splattered state I would have appeared the most likely candidate. I noticed that there was a slightly Bohemian looking character sitting, drinking coffee at an outdoor cafe just across the street. He gave a sympathetic shrug at my difficulties to which I enquired, *"Do you speak any English?"*. In a very posh and proper pommy accent he replied, *"I speak about eleven other languages besides old boy"*. As I was later to find out this very well spoken person was a linguist and a translator of English literature at a Spanish university. His given title was Charles Stevenson the third and he was born of well to do British aristocracy. Charles or Carlos as he preferred to be known lived in Spain to escape the insufferable boredom of his homeland and live out his final days in the grip of cancer.

I described my current ordeals to the man and without a moments hesitation he offered to act as my translator and guide. I told him that I had heaps of money, but he said that he was independently wealthy and wouldn't think of taking advantage of a distraught and vulnerable traveller. Carlos finished his coffee then he got me to wait at the table while he hailed a cab. The first taxi he signalled pulled over and I jumped in the back as he gave hurried directions from the front seat. The driver kept looking back at me suspiciously through his rear vision mirror as we motored out to the highway, but Carlos seemed to be putting him at ease with whatever was saying. I was to find out later that it was an agreed fifty percent increase on the meter charge. We got to the crash scene only to find the van had already been moved by the Civil guard, so we had to double back to Gandia in the hope of tracking it down.

At the local court office or 'Juzgado' as they are known we were informed that the van had been impounded at a local garage. Our passports were confiscated until the matter was resolved in court and I was told through Carlos that I was not allowed to leave Spain. After the drawn out process of proving who I was to the court official, he allowed me to take some travellers cheques that were retrieved from the wreckage. With all of that out of the way I was ready to get back to Joy at the clinic and receive another jab in the arse. Joy was a bit more compos-mentis than she had been on her arrival at the clinic but she could barely speak a word through her damaged mouth. I just sat quietly with her until visiting time was over then I walked out into the hot Spanish night in search of a room.

Carlos was waiting in the reception area as he had said he would and throughout our time together he proved the most reliable and steadfast companion any stranded traveller could want to have around. Being the multi-linguistic showoff he was with a healthy sense of adventure, Carlos had jumped at the chance to perform the role of translator and guide for a couple of desperate tourists. This fact helped greatly in making me feel that my ordeals were just a hurdle to pass so my own epic adventure could continue. My lot was made easier by his concerned presence and he was of great assistance just getting through the basics of daily life. My new acquaintance was a great bargain hunter who could sniff out the best deal on everything from hotel rooms to chilli prawns. No merchant or resteraunter could put a trick past him. He soon got me established in a low rent but very comfortable holiday unit which overlooked the village square in the old section of Gandia. My days revolved around the clinic and Joy's recovery until at last more than a month after the prang she was released from hospital care. The unit I had taken was up a long flight of stairs and it was not well suited to Joy's needs because her leg was still very sore. The hunt for a perfect Spanish residence was our first priority on her release from the clinic and this came sooner than either of us expected. We were eating paella in a restaurant and enjoying a performance by some flamenco dancers when Carlos became engaged in a conversation with a middle aged couple at the next table. He and the woman just happened to be fellow linguists.

They started conversing initially in English but were soon skipping between Spanish, French and an assortment of others I had never heard. Friendly vibes crossed from table to table as Carlos and Rita switched between languages and displayed their multi-linguistic skills. Before long we were all sitting at the same table drinking jugs of Sangria and getting to know each other as the dancers clicked and stamped around us. In the final count Carlos spoke twelve languages fluently and Rita spoke fifteen. Eric and Rita worked for a Norwegian shipping company and they were making the most of their last two days of shore leave. As was their normal routine they did three month stretches at sea and then three on the land, either at their villa in Spain or a country retreat in Sweden. Eric was the ships Bosun and it was Rita's job to keep all of the hungry sailors fed. They were lovely people and that spontaneous little gathering helped no end to lift Joy's spirits.

Carlos, myself and Eric got into the unavoidable male bonding thing with tales of the sea and worldly adventures while Rita and Joy confided on the sidelines in hushed, womanly tones. The following morning Joy was up bright and early to greet the day more spirited than I had seen her since before the smash. She was banging around the unit packing up our belongings as I struggled to open my eyes against the overhead light. On hearing of our plight the night before Rita had kindly offered Joy and I the use of their villa while she and her husband were away at sea.

We were invited to move in right away as they would be departing for Athens in the afternoon then the place would be available to us. Still yawning and half asleep we arrived by taxi at an authentic Spanish villa that was nestled among well laden orange groves extending all the way to Valencia. The couple were happy to see us and we were made to feel completely welcomed in their home. The morning flew by over countless coffees and light conversation until it was time for them to leave for the airport. They said that we could use the villa for as long as we needed and to just leave the key under the mat when we decided to go. Fantastic human beings. We bid them a kissy and huggy farewell from under a colourful tiled arch in the white stone courtyard then their weather beaten mercedes vanished up the dirt track in a fading cloud of dust. Joy and I grappled for words to express our gratitude.

After we had comprehended the seriousness of our situation my chance meeting with Carlos had offered the first glimmer of hope, but the villa was the thing that most helped to snap my poor, battered sweetheart out of her depression. To be granted rent free accommodation in such a picturesque setting was seen by us both as a sign that things were going to be ok. Joy was always the more sensible between us when it came to financial management and at the peak of my spending spree in Adelaide she had convinced me to invest in a flat to create an ongoing income. Now the big job was to negotiate a quick sale of the property so we could afford to get the hell out of Spain.

We had about seven hundred dollars worth of travellers checks left and I figured they should be able to sustain us until more money arrived from Australia and my accumulated debts were settled. Carlos had a pretty good overview of our situation as it related to the political climate of the day. The Spanish Dictator Franco had recently departed for the great hereafter and King Juan Carlos was appointed to rule the land. Democracy was high on the new political agenda and the old guard were fleeing the tourists for as much as they could before it was time to relinquish power. A clerk at the magistrates office handed Carlos a bill on my behalf for more than ten grand which was supposed to cover repairs to the damaged taxi and compensate the driver for a strained wrist. We organised an independent evaluation through another garage in the area and found that the bodywork to the taxi should have cost less than two thousand dollars to fix. Carlos said that the driver would probably receive a nominal cash bonus for his injuries, but the remainder would be split up between the local Judge and his cronies. My main priority was getting Joy and myself safely back to Australia and it was no time to start crusading against the corruption of some crooked Judge and his money grabbing mates. When Joy and I finally retrieved our belongings from the front desk of the court we found that some recently taken snapshots were missing. Their disappearance made a little more sense when Carlos informed me that our pictures had been listed at all of the Spanish border crossings. He said if we tried to leave the country without paying our bills we would be shot on sight.

After much pleading by Carlos at the Juzgado we were given permission to leave Gandia and travel to Madrid for the purpose of signing documents and the like. The Australian Embassy was the medium by which I had to negotiate a quick sale of the flat and organise the transfer of funds. The Embassy Officials we had to deal with turned out to be a pack of useless, bistro loitering wankers who wouldn't piss on a fellow countryman if he was on fire. I had to push them every step of the way to act on our behalf and it seemed like every time I called to make important enquiries the Ambassador was out to lunch. On one of our trips to Madrid we stopped off in Valencia to check out the sights. It wasn't officially permitted by the Magistrates office, but there was no way that they could really check up on us once we had left Gandia.

We were sitting in the Valencia railway station eating lunch and admiring the intricate tiled ceiling when a group of buskers entered the large open dining area and set up to play. They were a scruffy and road weary lot who looked like desperados from a B grade spaghetti western. Their music was a mix of Latin and African rhythms which missed not a beat and activated the long silent metronome in my soul. They offered an exciting escape from the pressures of our ordeal and it must have shown with each boisterous applause I gave them. The lead singer came strutting over to our table strumming his guitar and delivered a passion filled serenade as Joy and I acted like young lovers on a trouble free, romantic fling. I slipped the busker a thousand peseta note after the song which was received with laughter and hearty cheers from them all. In an awkward attempt at English He said, *"At last we are possible to eat again, Gracious Senor"*. The minstrals pulled up at our table and started ordering food and wine as they continued to play. At Spain's cheap prices I had given them enough to eat for a couple of days and they expressed their appreciation in a further out pouring of exotic song and dance. The musicians chowed down to large bowls of fish soup that were eagerly mopped up with large chunks of unbuttered bread. Enrico the singer said they had just arrived in Spain from Morocco and all of their money had been used up on fuel. When we were leaving the restaurant I settled their bill along with our own and left a substantial tip for the staff. I would have liked to have stayed a bit longer drinking beer with the street performers and digging their music, but Joy's leg was hurting and our train was due to arrive. As I was about to stand up Enrico purposefully banged my knee with his own from under the table. With his eyes he made a downward gesture and he was tapping my thigh gently with his fingers. I reached under the table as he seemed to be suggesting and my palm was greeted by a sensation not unlike the spongy mass of a ball of plasticine. It was about as big as a golf ball and it emanated a sweet hashish aroma that was so strong it almost made my eyes water. Enrico said, *"We bring from Morocco in hubcaps, ... we got plenty"*. As discreetly as I could I tucked the lump of putty hash into the front of my underpants and stood up.

The other musicians remained seated but Enrico rose when we did and he carried Joy's bag for her as we walked towards the platform. There was a public toilet along the way into which we were promptly herded by our escort. After making sure there was nobody in the toilets he lit a one paper joint that when fired up instantly sent out a giveaway pungent odour. Each of us took three quick, deep puffs on the joint, then it was flushed down the loo and we split. Quick farewells were exchanged by all as we got away from the toilets as fast as we could. That was the first real smoke I had enjoyed since leaving Australia and Jesus it felt good. The low grade rubbish we had bought in England wasn't even worth a mention and I hadn't come across any at all since we hit the continent. In my newfound state of euphoria I had to suppress a mounting grin from externalising onto my face as we handed our tickets over at the barriers. Joy was in much the same predicament, but for her it was worse because every time she attempted to smile her bottom lip gave way to pain. We had to deliberately avoid each others eyes to spare her a possible split and bleeding mouth, but our true affections were exchanged in those moments. Once on the platform and walking towards our carriage we realised that both trains on either side were filled with fresh faced young soldiers. They must have been new recruits going off somewhere for military training and we became the focus of their collective scrutiny as we walked towards our carriage.

Noticing that many a lustful eye was glued to my girl's arse I found it a lot to endure, so in my very stoned and charged up state I decided to make known my own presence. They were just playful kids dressed up as soldiers and if we were going to be sitting among them for the next few hours I thought this was as good a time as any to break the ice. I let out an unrestrained, ... 'Koo ... eee !' that was so loud it must have reverberated throughout the whole station. Taking this as their cue for some train travel hi jinks the young recruits exploded on either side of the platform in joyful screams and shouts of approval. We doubled our step and hopped into the compartment just as the engine of the train kicked over. Once seated and getting comfortable Joy's face suddenly changed from expressions of amusement to that of horror. From her seat which was facing the rear of the train she spotted two armed Civil guard officers running up the platform towards our carriage. They must have had a complaint about the smell of hash coming from the toilets and the racket of the young soldiers would have led them off in search of the culprits. In the time it took to walk from the terminal to the train the hash had started to melt. The stifling heat of our compartment wasn't helping the situation and the aroma coming from my balls was a dead giveaway. I couldn't reach down and do anything about it because that would have just made the smell worse, so like a man with three testicles I just had to sit it out until the moment was right to make a move.

The two guards on the platform had stopped running and were moving in slow deliberate steps as they bent low and examined the occupants of the trains. There were a couple of stern faced officers sitting directly behind us and I was getting extremely nervous about the fact the Spanish military and the police were so closely connected. Joy's quick thinking eased the tension significantly when she did something I never would have thought of. Pulling a compact out of her bag she started powdering her nose in hurried and theatrical strokes. Then producing a small white bottle she gave herself an abundant spray of womanly scent. The molecules of highly aromatic hashish that had started wafting through the compartment were suddenly blown to oblivion in an overwhelming haze of 'Taboo' perfume.

Even though there were officers in the carriage the young recruits around us made loud, verbal gestures of approval. Our compartment was right at the front of the train. The civil guard officers came to a stop just outside of our window, but all I could see was their brightly polished boots. They were joined on the platform by the well worn workboots of the engine driver which caused an indescribable ache in the pit of my guts. I leaned back in my seat to get a better view of what was going on and I could pretty well decipher the tone of the conversation by their body language. The officers wanted to search the train but the driver was pointing at his watch and indicating that he had to go. 'Praise be thy name', and 'Halle, fucking, ... lujha,' the driver got his way and returned victorious to the controls. Then like the first lazy yawn of a waking bear in spring the train started to pull away. I reached for Joy's perfume bottle and blasted it down the front of my pants then got up and went in search of a toilet. I received some pretty weird looks from the young soldiers as I moved between the carriages but it was better to have smelled like a heavily perfumed female than a hash stall in some Moroccan bazaar. Now free to examine my badly planned stash spot I found the hash was engulfed in a clutch of pubic hairs and my groin area was soaking wet from a stinging cocktail of perfume and sweat. I placed a handful of toilet tissues over the whole obscene mess and just yanked the ball from it's tangled and smelly hiding spot. I flushed most of my tobacco down the toilet and used the packet to wrap the hash in. Then ever so quickly I stuffed the highly illegal package deep inside of my boot. On our return journey to Gandia the soldiers must have thought there was something strange about this tourista' woman who kept spraying herself with such potent perfume but no-one complained because it was probably the last hint of femininity they would be smelling for some time. As we stepped from the train at our destination the young recruits made note of our departure. The train moved away and they were at the windows making playful gestures involving suggestions of sex and the smoking of illegal substances.

'Viva, ... [a, ... Espana'

Once back at the villa I removed my boots and attempted to salvage our most welcomed little score. The hash blackened toilet paper was removed from around the ball and I scraped away the outer layer which had become a disgusting hairy crust formed by sweat, perfume and soggy dunny paper. I removed the offending foreign matter with a razor blade and was left with a lump of sweet smelling hashish that weighed about half an ounce. The original ball would have weighed in at more than an ounce including the portion I scraped away and it was very potent stuff. The smallest amount sprinkled into a joint was enough to keep Joy and I buzzing for half a day and our little stash of 'who gives a flying fuck?' mood adjuster was just the best thing to help us cope with the pressures of being stranded in a foreign land. Our communications with Australia dragged on from week to week with long waits between each newly signed and forwarded legal document. Joy had to stay indoors most of the time to keep the sun from burning her lip so we made up for it in the evenings with lavish banquets and cheap booze in Gandia's many outside cafes. Carlos generally accompanied us and acted as our translator with any interesting locals or travellers we encountered. The villa had three spare rooms which were gladly offered to any low budget backpackers we met who were in need of accommodation. The place had come to us through pure chance and it seemed like the thing to do to share it around. I love cooking for people and our little courtyard among the orange groves was the most perfect setting for late evening, candle lit meals.

Of the many travellers we sheltered some played guitars and others had instruments with them like flutes, harmonica and tabla drums. Vinnie came from Argentina and he was the most accomplished musician by far. As well as traditional tunes from his homeland he could also play Santana favourites and other popular songs of the time. Vinnie stayed with us for about two weeks which provided a great opportunity to stretch my voice a little. Vinnies playing much like that of Donald back in England was perfectly suited to my natural vocal tones. He could anticipate the slightest change I made in the melody and it wasn't long before our informal jam sessions turned into composition workshops for original material. We smoked hash and serenaded the night into morning by a flickering orangewood fire under a sea of Spanish stars. With each new song we came out with I was reminded that my true purpose was to sing and I was touched by an increased motivation to get back to Australia and pursue my destiny. Carlos arrived around ten o'clock each morning on his Bultaco motor cycle and we would plan our daily activities over breakfast. This went on for almost three months until the property in Adelaide was eventually sold. Once the deal was formalised we had to embark on the painfully slow process of getting my bank in Australia to transfer the money to the Banco De Espana in Gandia.

Carlos received word through the magistrates office that my damaged camper had to be moved from the motor repairer where it had been stored as it was taking up room needed for other vehicles. I rode over to the mechanics workshop with Carlos on the back of his trailbike and we found that my van had been parked in a side lane the day before. The few remaining possessions I had left in it such as fishing and camping gear had been pilfered in the night and the local kids had sprayed their initials in black from bumper to bumper. Joy's blood was smeared all over the crumpled passenger door and the overall image brought home the impact of how lucky we were to be alive. The owner of the Garage showed little concern when I complained about what had happened to my vehicle but at least he offered to tow it to a spot he knew of where it could stay until I made other arrangements. What arrangements? The bloody thing had been declared contra-banned by the court which meant it was not allowed to leave the area and I wasn't even permitted to sell it for spare parts. I had no option but to go along with his suggestion as my only alternative was to abandon it where it stood. Carlos let me borrow his motor bike so I could follow the tow truck and find out where the van was going to be stashed. As the blood stained wreckage of my camper was hauled slowly through the streets of Gandia old ladies crossed themselves in fly screened doorways. On the edge of town we followed a dirt track which came to an end in a smelly backwater swamp. All there was to conceal the van from the highway were some mounds of busted up concrete and a small patch of cane. The mechanic disconnected the camper from his tow truck and most begrudgingly I paid him the last of what he was owed. He drove away at great speed which I assumed was because we were involved in an illegal act. Not so it seemed, the slimy little maggot had set me up. As the dust settled I saw a group of people walking towards me from behind the concrete mounds. There was a fucking Gypsy camp in there somewhere and they knew that I was coming because they all had tools in their hands. Not one of them spoke any English and they were actually quite jovial as they proceeded to strip the van. There was no way I could have communicated that I was the owner of the vehicle and in any case it would have been irrelevant to this pack of happy scavengers. As I watched my property being plundered it highlighted the powerlessness I had been subjected to for the last three months. In that moment I was taken by a violent, yet controlled new instinct and my accumulated rage was replaced by decisive and vengeful action. Under the folding bed in the back of the camper I had stored a tin container full of petrol. I retrieved the fuel then disconnected the portable gas bottle from the cupboard under the sink. The Gypsies had jacked up the back wheels by this stage and they were being hastily removed. They were all so busy attending to acts of petty theft that they didn't notice what I was up to until it was too late. The searing radiation of the blast let them know that the game was over quick smart. There were Gypsies running in all directions as I jumped on the Bultaco and kicked it over. I rode away up the track laughing and skidded to a stop at the crest of a small hill.

Belligerently I shouted, "Fuck you all" as the gas bottle blew and lifted the pop up adjustable roof about fifty feet in the air. It came crashing back to earth narrowly missing a couple of the looters and they screamed abuse in Spanish as I made my way back to town. It was a good job my money was due to arrive from Australia the following day because should the civil guard have discovered the burnt out remains of the van it could have made things difficult and further detained our departure. Blowing it up was a pretty delinquent thing to do considering our situation, but it was well worth the risk for just one spectacular moment where I was in control. I was so charged up on adrenaline by the time I got back to the villa that it took three man sized hash joints to calm me down. The best portion of the hashball had kept us stoned for about eight weeks and we were frantically disposing of the perfume scented outer crust prior to our flight to London. Every now and again the joint we were sharing would crackle and pop as an undetected pubic hair went up in smoke and it triggered a chummy little chuckle every time. Joy and I were up bright and early the next morning packing and preparing to leave. The villa had been an absolute god sent and without it we would have really been struggling to make ends meet. We were down to our last eighty bucks from some money that Joy's parents had forwarded to her account and the way things stood we would probably have to stay with her Nan in the Cotswolds until we could raise enough cash to fly home. That was a daunting prospect indeed. We caught a taxi into Gandia and found Carlos waiting at the Bar Piccadilly as we had arranged. After rushed coffees and plans to reconnect with Joy we jumped on the bike and rode off towards the magistrates office. Along the way I got him to pull over near the beach so we could have a farewell smoke.

I rolled a deadly five paper scoob which was stoked with a large pinch of hash dust from the final dregs of my supply. I left Carlos with what remained because the last thing I needed was to get busted trying to leave the country holding dope. At all of our prior meetings Carlos had negotiated on my behalf but at times I felt he got in the way of potential opportunities. Something deep in the pit of my guts was telling me that I should clear the field and conduct my last official transaction alone. Before the joint was finished I told Carlos that I wanted to deal with the Juscado on my own. He was surprised by the sudden change of plans and he said that he hoped I wasn't intending to try anything stupid. I casually dismissed his suggestion as ridiculous but in the back of my mind the cogs of mischievous intent had shifted to high gear. In the short time it took to smoke the joint I had contrived a scheme which might give the corrupt Spanish Judge a taste of his own medicine. In my highly charged and adrenaline soaked state I entertained notions of grabbing the money and running which would have rivalled many a Hollywood action blockbuster.

It felt like an ingenious new strategy was just staring me in the face and if I didn't act on it I deserved to get ripped off. The way things stood I was the only one they were interested in as Joy's passport had been handed back to her after the court decided she was free of blame. As best I could imagine the skinny little clerk at the front desk would accompany me and my passport to the bank and this is where I spotted a window of opportunity. There were a number of back alleys between the courthouse and the bank into which I might lure and restrain my young escort and by the time they found him Joy and I would be long gone. The money grabbing magistrates would be left to lament the one that got away and we would be free of their evil, scheming clutches. It seemed like a perfectly workable plan but it could also have proved fatal if I failed. I told Carlos to drop me off a few doors up from the courthouse so we wouldn't be noticed arriving together. He did as I instructed and we gave each other a final hug goodbye. My faithful companion scooted off into the morning traffic waving over his shoulder and almost collided with a fruit truck that was pulling out from the kerb. The extravagantly packed joint we had smoked on the beach was causing my mind to race along faster than caution or reason could possibly allow. Then from out of nowhere like the hooked strands of a North Queensland stinging plant a sense of crippling paranoia started to set in. By the time I got to the courthouse I was so shaken that I abandoned all hope of pulling off any sort of dangerous scam.

'IMAGINATION, ... SHEESH!, IT COULD GET A MAN KILLED'.

When first we started arranging to have my funds transferred from Australia to Spain I instructed the bank to send only the ten grand I had to hand over as I was worried the Judge and his thieving colleagues might try to confiscate any additional money that arrived. The Magistrate who I had only met once before went by the name of Senor Morragis and he was a mean eyed, obese lump of a man with an uncanny resemblance to Jabba the Hut. Moraggis spoke in only his native tongue so a female receptionist was called in to assist. The poor girl was not capable of much more besides, ... "Hello" so I did most of the talking as we struggled to get through the formalities. The Judge wanted to know why Carlos was not there to translate for me and I explained with a little aeroplane display that he had flown to England the day before.

"LONDON, ... LONDON, ... HE GO, ... BROOOOOOOM!, ...

TO LONDON, ... ENGLAND, ...

YOU FAT, ... THIEVING, ARSEHOLE, ... DEADSHIT!"

The Judge looked at me like I was a complete madman but eventually he got the drift. He was noticeably perturbed by the absence of Carlos and I felt a twinge of satisfaction just knowing that I had made his scam just a little bit harder to get through. At his office desk Moraggis reached down into a drawer and produced my passport. I half expected that he might get the girl to escort me to the bank but instead he slipped the plastic folder inside of his finely tailored suit. The fat pig stood up and walked to the door saying, "*Banco, vamoose!*" in a gruff and impatient tone.

In the hall on the way out he instructed two machine gunned civil guard to follow us up the street. I noted with a concealed grimace that this was the point at which my scheme would have been blown to oblivion due to critical details that had slipped my mind. Once inside of the bank the foot soldiers stood at attention by the door. Moraggis handed me my passport and I stood in line at one of the teller windows. The Judge waddled off and pushed through some low swinging doors into the office area of the bank. He was greeted by a man who looked like the banks Manager and I could see through the plate glass partitions that they were lighting up cigars. Moraggis and the other bloke appeared to be conversing more about last Saturdays bullfight than anything to do with me and the attention of the guards was firmly directed towards a flotilla of passing females. As I tapped my foot and waited in the line a daring new strategy entered my thoughts. The way things were loaded I was an unknown commodity to the Judge. It was quite conceivable that a young traveller like myself might lose his grip on reality while being detained in a foreign land and as a last resort he could even perform desperate and irrational acts in his efforts to get back home. This possible scenario stuck in my brain and formed the basis of a script that I was more than capable of acting out.

The person in front of me concluded their transaction and I was summoned over by the teller. After my details were confirmed by the clerk the business of counting and handing over large wads of cash commenced. The interest of my armed escorts remained otherwise engaged as the money was being counted and stacked right under my nose at the little window. When the bank attendant turned around to grab some more rubber bands I quickly scooped up one of the wads of notes. I checked to see that the Judge and his minders weren't looking as I slipped the cash deep inside my boot. As I had hoped the teller didn't bother recounting the bound stacks of money he had already done. The whole lot was placed in a large brown envelope and after signing the necessary papers I left the window with it under my arm. Clutching my passport in sweaty fingers I walked over and stood by the swinging doors the Judge had gone through. In his own sweet time he concluded the little chat he was having with his buddy and then strolled over to join me. He took my passport and placed it back in his pocket then we left the bank with the soldiers following close behind. There was no turning back now.

I had committed to a dangerous plan which would require all of the balls and quick thinking I could summon. In line with my new strategy I displayed great excitement at having received the money from Australia. Even though none of them could understand a word I was saying I verbalised my relief that we were finally leaving Spain. *"Oh! Australia, ... bueno, ... fantastico, ... eh! Senor?"* I went into a dramatised description of how my poor girlfriend had been injured in the prang and needed to be back at home with her family. The Judge and the civil guard officers looked at me like I was an absolute flitpot and that was exactly how I wanted to appear. When we arrived back at the Judges office he returned my passport to the lower drawer of his desk and locked it with a small key. There was a tap on the door and we were joined by a couple of middle aged men who I had never seen before. Moragis beckoned with a snap of his fingers that I should hand over the money to be counted. I passed him the envelope which was promptly ripped open and wads of cash were dumped on his desk. Moraggis and his associates started fingering through the notes like jackals at a fresh kill and as they counted the money there was an air of restrained pleasure about them. In keeping with the mood of the moment and wanting to further expand on my 'cuckoos nest' routine, I allowed all of my homeward bound elation to come babbling forth at once. It was only a matter of time before they realised they were short by two grand and I was sweating on the fact the bank manager hadn't told Moragis how much had been sent. Then it started. The three men were up in arms about the fact some money was missing from their haul. Meaningless figures were fired at me in Spanish and I seized the opportunity to buckle under the pressure. Sitting down in a chair I started shouting, *"No comprehend Senor"*, ... and, ... *"Banco mistake Senor"*, but they persisted. The money was recounted to make sure they hadn't got it wrong and this bought extra time for me to embellish my 'loony tunes cabaret'. I mumbled incoherently to myself and swayed back and forward in the chair as the second counting took place. They finally confirmed that the error was not their own but now at least I could be certain that Moragis had not conspired with the bank manager to divulge how much I was worth. I started pacing up and down in the Judges office explaining as best I could that the money I had given them was all I had in the world. In words that sounded halfway between Spanish and English I attempted to describe how my house and car had been sold in Australia to honour the debt. *"La coche, La casa, finito Senor, ... finito"*.

With exaggerated and frantic hand movements I started working into a babbling and incoherent frenzy repeating the words over and over, *"No poss, ... i, ... blee, ... Senor, ... No poss, ... i, ... blee!"* When all attempts to communicate hit on deaf ears I lunged into one final and grandiose gesture of desperation. As I leaned over the money dripping tears and facing the three men I hooked my fingers under the office desk and flipped it over. The money went bouncing into the air and I scrambled for the lower drawer. I was well aware that Moragis had locked it but my actions seemed right in line with the stressed out foreign nutcase that I was attempting to portray.

By the time the civil guard came bursting into the office I was grovelling on the floor like a squashed centipede and repeating the words, "pass, a, ... porte, ... Senor, ... por favour, ... pass, ... a, porte". There were two loaded and cocked machine guns pointing directly at my temples as I buried my head in my hands and sobbed ferociously. The civil guard lifted me off the floor on the Judges instructions and I was placed in a corner of the room. The machine guns were then levelled at my stomach as I continued to weep and moan like an overgrown child. If not death then I expected the next thing to happen was a look at the inside of a Spanish jail, but instead something extraordinary took place. Moraggis bent down to the upturned desk and opened the drawer with his key. He pulled the passport out and gave a conceited little smirk as he threw it at my feet. The civil guard officers stood back and lowered their guns, then Moragis just looked at the other Judges and shrugged. I grovelled out of the door backwards clutching my passport and sobbing many, "por favours". I even carried the act so far as to attempt a kiss at the slimy mongrels hand. The last thing I heard coming from the office as I was escorted down the hall was the Judges partners in crime scorning him for letting me go. To this day I have no idea why he did it. Perhaps I had earned a position in his two hard basket with my outrageous performance or he might have actually respected the level to which I was prepared to go. Who knows? but whatever it was I got the hell out of there faster than I had run in a long time.

I gave a dazzled taxi driver the equivalent of a Spanish hundred buck note the moment I jumped in his cab and told him to pretend he was Jackie Stewart at the Grand Prix. Joy was waiting patiently at the Bar Piccadilly when we pulled up. The engine was left running as I raced inside and virtually dragged her out. I didn't even bother to stick our bags in the boot and they served as pillows on the way to the airport. Due to a fortunate cancellation we managed to get a flight to London which departed about two hours after we pulled up. At the baggage checkpoints and immigration I remembered what Carlos had said about my picture being posted at all of the Spanish frontiers and it caused an additional bout of the jitters that I certainly could have done without. The photograph thing must have been bullshit because we passed through each procedure without any kind of incident. I was so shaken and upset by the events that had transpired I was still looking over my shoulder as the plane took off for England.



MORRAGIS

***Hey! there scoundrel I am your conscience,
that unscratchable itch inside your brain.***

I see through all of your lies and deceptions

For you and I are one and the same.

***I am with you as you carve your path , through the spoils
of corruption and the common law***

***nothing will escape my pin sharp perceptions as you
plunder worldly riches and stash your hoard.***

***Who exactly do you think you are? in your well secluded
finery and castle high are you a man of good intentions,
or the messenger of doom in a saints disguise.***

***Whatever the case your end is near, for the voice of the people is taking form
the book of time is a noble tale and you are the target of the common scorn.***

CHAPTER ELEVEN



'So, ... WHAT'S YOUR STORY BUD?'

Eh! Hold on a minute. That hydroponic bud I just mulled up was different to the other ones. Yeah! The way it fell off the scissors, it was more easily fluffed up as it fell into the bowl and it smells way more pungent than the rest. Aah! Fuck, the way it's smoking is different as well. I hope I haven't mixed a half ounce of 'Super weed' with that other low grade stuff I was landed with last week. Just a second. Yeah! Mmmm! That's good man. When I mixed the two bags together I thought they were from the same batch because they looked pretty much the same. Nah! This ones got far more kick and as I examine the two more closely under the lamp light here, the bud I chopped up for this joint I'm smoking is more compact and there are lots more little red hairs. Yeah! Man this is much better weed. Good shit. I've scored big time and I didn't even know it. Since the pandemic I've started I've been stocking up on grass with all my spare cash from a few different sources but I'm gonna have to start paying more attention so I don't mix them up again.

For the first since I left the Northern Rivers I managed to pick up some top shelf bush weed at a good price and it makes a nice change from all the chemical spiced hydro stuff around the place. The hyde's makes me feel slightly on edge and hyper active where as bush weed does the job nicely to calm and relax me as it gets me in a state where I'm more prone to have a chuckle at the stupidest little things. There were a few seeds in the bag of bushy I scored so I've been germinating them and now my little spring time babies are about as tall as a bong. As I scoot about the area I've been keeping an eye out for any likely growing locations in the bushland bordering public reserves where the joggers and dog walkers don't go. So far I've spotted a couple of good places close to trickles of fresh water that I can actually drive the scooter to. When they are big enough and I've separated all the females I'm going to put them in the ground close to the trunks of bushes that are of a similar colour.

This next episode in the walk in and sit down movie of my life is about our return to Australia as the ordeals and tribulations of our overseas holiday were left behind. After all of my vacation expenses had been paid for I was no longer the wealthy young buck I had been and it was time to tighten my belt. Pull up a bean bag and roll yourself a scoob and I'll tell you the whole story right now.

"Yeah! man, Nice Gunga!"



BACK IN OZ



If I'm not the one driving, my policy has always been to get tanked up whenever I embark on any kind of long distance travel and that's just for interstate road trips within Australia. A journey involving twenty plus hours in the air was certainly a daunting prospect so I knew I was going to need all the help I could get. The thought of going without a ciggie for that long was starting to give this time seasoned nicotine addict the jitters and I had to come up with a practical solution to my dilemma before the plane took off. The payoff for my dangerous little stunt in Spain was sufficient to secure our airline tickets back to England and pay back the cash loans we had received from Joys relations but little besides. With what was left of our English currency we had just enough assorted notes and small change to purchase a block of hash from a hawker I got chatting with at a newspaper stand near the terminal. Once that was sorted out we were left with a barely sufficient food and refreshments budget for the flight home but at least I had some smoko. After the scrutiny I had received at our previous visit to Heathrow airport I was too paranoid to attempt a pre-departure smoke so I ate the tasty, little nugget of Hashish in the airport carpark before we boarded the plane. I assumed the crumbly block of Lebanese blonde was the same brand of low grade shit we had come to expect in Britain, but as things turned out it was quite the opposite. It looked much the same as the stuff I had been scoring around the pubs in England but it was a little stickier to the touch and it had a distinctly sharper aroma.

As the fat soluble THC molecules were slowly absorbed into my digestive system they did more than just ease the boredom of our trans continental flight. For most of the journey I was chatting away madly to anyone who would listen, as I tinkered on the edge of a THC overdose. For the remainder of the flight I was numbed to oblivion in semi conscious extra terrestrial slumber. It was a good job that Joy declined to eat any of the hash because it was more like a tripping experience than just being stoned. Jesus after all we had been through and this close to getting home, the last thing we needed was one of her emotional bum trips in mid air. She was in extreme discomfort for the entire journey due to the cramped seating condition and she complained that her leg was beginning to throb.

The first signs of swelling and increased redness were enough to convince a flight attendant that she should dig out the strongest pain killers she could find in the medicine cabinet. Three panadine forte tablets were gulped down by our patient with a slug of Southern comfort then Joy fell asleep with her legs across my lap protruding into the aisle. She was holding up like a real trooper in spite of the pain and I was proud of her. Our Melbourne to Adelaide flight touched down after a bumpy descent through turbulent and gut wrenching winds. As we walked down the steps towards the landing strip it felt good to be out of the plane and savouring the familiar scent of my home soil. I did exactly as I had promised in my intoxicated stupor and bent down to kiss the oil stained bitumen tarmac, just the same as pope what's his face does. The other travelers were amused by my drunken hi jinks but Joy could barely force a smile. We were greeted at the Adelaide airport by Joy's clan and the swollen leg was given top priority amid a flood of tears and family reconnections. Joys old man was generally a sedate driver but he abandoned his normal commuting speed on the way to the Flinders Medical Center and as soon as the attending doctor saw the leg Joy was admitted. Deep vein thrombosis was not big in the news back then but any swelling associated with air travel was still given special attention. After three days of tests and examinations it turned out that there was a well established blood clot in the injured leg that was nudging ever closer towards Joys heart. The specialists at the hospital were amazed by the fact the clot had not been detected at the clinic in Spain and they condemned it as nothing short of criminal negligence. The head doctor suggested in his professional rage that we should sue the primitive bastards through diplomatic channel and in doing so he triggered one of Joys rarely seen but much welcomed smiles. Joy stayed with her folks for the first three weeks after she got out of hospital and I set up camp in a rehearsal studio that was being used by my old band Fusion. When I decided to go to Europe it had caused a stir among the lads that led to my untimely departure from the band. I guess they mistakenly assumed I would be pouring most of my money into new music equipment for the band but I wanted to see a bit of the world while I still had the cash to enjoy it. Before we had even finished organizing our passports and visas for the trip a friend of Peter Wibrows was recruited to fill my position at the mike. In the time we were away a manager had been appointed to promote the band and it looked like the gigs were starting to roll in. The new front man Greg was working out just fine and I couldn't really hold any ill feelings towards him because he was such a bloody good singer. Hanging with the guys was a great introduction back into the Australian swing of things and I was confident it was only a matter of time before another singing position would come my way. Greg was an easy going and likable guy who had brought a whole new air of professionalism to the band. We really hit it off in spite of the fact I was aching to make a lunge for the microphone the whole time.

He must have received some good reports about me from the lads in my absence and after he heard me singing he suggested that I join the band for a few guest spots at the gigs. All of them thought it was a great idea and before long I was back under the limelight doing the thing I love most.

[a . . . Cantari.

The band performed at the most popular of Adelaide's drinking holes where four on the floor progressive metal was the order of the day. As I watched them go through the motions of trying to get famous I actually found myself relieved that I had left the group before we went overseas. Their highly aggressive and overly market conscious, new manager was a little too draconian in his approach and it occurred to me that the lads were turning into just another pack of trained seals. They were forfeiting their own creativity to satisfy market trends and they became increasingly more mediocre in the process. The group had obviously lost the magic and the fire in their attempts to bend to public approval. The role that would have been required of me if I had of stayed with the band was almost too embarrassing to think about and it's a part I would have been incapable of playing having tasted the power of calling the shots so early in the game. Besides the pursuit of stardom in the guise of a metal rock, sex machine now seemed extremely limited. The accumulated teachings of my mentors had planted a seed among my thoughts that there was a higher and more significant purpose waiting for me just a little further up the track. If I could only see it. After months of waiting around and having to inter-react with yet another time consuming beurocracy I received a substantial insurance payout for our Spanish mis-adventure. It came through a travel policy that Joy had convinced me to buy just before we left. The policy originally cost me one hundred and twenty seven dollars and I came away with about nine grand cash in hand. It was a welcomed score to top up my account, but barely adequate to replace the twenty odd thousand I had lost to those corrupt, rip off, mother fucking judges back in Spain. Joys new teeth and assorted medical bills ended up costing about four thousand dollars so with what was left of my cash reserves plus the insurance payout I had about nineteen grand left to work with. Joy wanted to use it all as down payment on a quiet little plot in the country, but I cringed at the thought of being committed to any kind of debt.

Being so close to a working band I soon came to realize who was making all the money and it wasn't my struggling muso mates or their success hungry manager. It was the pub owners who were selling the booze to the punters and the guys behind the scenes who hired out all of the PA systems, lighting rigs, trucks and everything else that make your average rock and roll show happen. Becoming a publican was out of the question because I would probably end up drinking the beer barrels dry and at the end of the day I would be just another mug who was busting his arse to pay off a bank.

The only real option available to me and within my means was to buy a van and a PA system and start learning how to be a sound technician. In the role of the Musical hire man come knockabout roadie I would be able to further explore the workings of the entertainment industry and probably make more money than I would as frontman in a new band. I put the idea to Joy and she thought it sounded like a wonderful idea. Before I had even finished telling her about my plan she was suggesting that we should use the first twelve months profit as down payment on some land and we would have a steady income to cover the monthly repayments. Jesus fucking Christ! There's no escape from it. I was struck with the same feeling of being trapped and controlled that I used to experience every time Anna Maria spotted a new born infant.

'EEEK' ... I'm Doomed'

I bought an ex Mr. Juicy Ford Transit van which had been battered by years of service, but the engine and the rest of the mechanics seemed to be in really good nick. My driving underwent a remarkable transformation after I acquired the new set of wheels. From my previous incarnation as a piss tank, speed freak who was a surefire bet for disaster I became a moderate, mostly sober and excessively cautious motorist, who was allowing past experience be his guide. Joy and I rented a one bedroom flat at Moana Beach which was right next door to friendly little kiosk and just a stones throw from the pounding surf. As part of our chummy little nest building routine we adopted a full breed golden cocker spaniel pup from the local dog pound whom we named 'Lady' after the movie 'Lady and the Tramp'. The dog was soon to become Joys replacement off spring and my little traveling companion as we explored the coastal fringe. A short walk up the beach from our flat the weathered, sandstone cliffs at Maslins beach towered high above the surf like a scene from some exotic movie. It's the first location in Australia to become a fully legalized nudist beach courtesy of the late Don Dunstan. As I looked out my front door in quieter and more reflective moments I decided that the view I beheld in my front yard was equal to anything I had seen in my world travels. I placed an order with one of the local music shops for a PA system, which I was assured would take less than three weeks to assemble and would end up costing me about thirteen grand. As you might expect more weeks than were quoted dragged on as we waited for some component or other to arrive from the states. I was getting extremely tired of all the feeble excuses for the delay because I wanted to get up and running with my new enterprise. External forces were holding me down and steering me towards the path of excess. I needed to get creative to replace the sense of helplessness I was feeling, so I decided to act on an idea I had a couple of days earlier while Lady and I were banging around out on the beach. There's a little rocky beach between Moana and Maslins known as 'Ochre cove' and I had heard from one of the locals that it was the place where the local Aborigines used to go for the coloured dirt they used in their face paint and the like. Sure enough when Lady and I climbed over the dunes and went high up into the sandstone crevasses I found a seemingly infinite range of colors. With just a little scraping the oxides were easily separable from the sandstone bed rock and as much as possible I concentrated on retaining the distinction between the colors.

I placed the ochre in individual snap seal bags and after we rolled home that evening I started seeing what I could do with them. The kitchen table became my work station as the earlier sense of boredom I had been enduring was replaced by creative frenzy. The colors began to flow and merge on large sheets of newly purchased carbon paper like a Mississippi delta of melting rainbows. Swirling and spiraling into each other and creating virtual landscapes formed by millions of tiny sand granules. When the painted sheets I was churning out had dried enough they were placed all over the walls of the kitchen, dining room, even in the toilet. Anywhere one could be hung it was. The effect was astounding. Joy said it made her feel like she was flashing back to an acid trip and I knew exactly what she was talking about, because it was making me feel the same way. I started wondering whether I had tapped into some hidden, magical ritual of the 'Ooga, Booga' tribe up the track, but that was probably more a case of wishful thinking than any kind of actual reality. The music shop who were supposed to have by PA built in "less than three weeks" were blaming the continuing delays on some cargo container dispute in America. I just hung up the phone in anger and disgust. I rolled a joint to calm down from the hassle then I went back to my painting. The 'Organic psychedelia' collection as I named the first pieces had used up a lot of my ochre supply but I still had plenty in the plastic bags and there was an endless supply just up the beach. The new edition I was working on were based on the authentic works of the aboriginies with lines and dots being the main feature throughout. I was making regular trips to the Adelaide museum and Art gallery so as to make detailed sketches of the work before me and to associate the pieces with the legends they illustrated.

Joy and I were sitting around in the beer garden at the British hotel on a Friday night hopping into steaks and drinking Liebfrauwine. We were waiting for the band to kick off over in the corner and for Steve White to get home from work. When last we spoke on the phone he said he was interested in seeing the work I was doing with the ochre, so I had brought a couple of my favorite selections along. They were sitting rolled up on the table out of harms way of the splash fest happening all around. Steve finally arrived in his work clothes from the Coke factory and he ordered a big juicy steak. The Friday night crowd had really started to roll in and it was turning into a quite a rowdy scene. After we had eaten and the plates were cleared away I pulled out the paintings to show them to Steve, but what followed took us all by complete surprise. Steve and I had been passing joints to each other under the table since he arrived and we were more vulnerable than we knew to the prevailing forces at work around us. As I unfolded the pieces onto the table and started explaining the legends behind them, a Coorie guy who resembled the legendary thunder god himself emerged into the midst of our gathering through an almost magical parting of the beer garden revellers. I swear he was doing some kind of sacred dance as he approached our table and all three of us were left slightly gob smacked. Not only did it look totally amazing there was dialogue forthcoming as well. He was looking over the paintings with an air of knowledgeable foreboding, shaking his head in a mode of theatrical condemnation and saying, "Ooooooh! My brother"... *"You better tread careful tonight or the Featherman gonna get you."* Steve and Joy just cracked up as I invited 'Gunook' the spooky little blackfella who had zeroed in on me to sit down and join us.

I shouted him one jug of Coopers Ale after another and he gave us the full rundown on who this 'Featherman' character was and why he goes out hunting for whities who fuck around with blackfella, sacred art. All of what Gunook told us served as a priceless insight into his world, beyond anything you will ever read in a text book. I had no idea about the rights of passage one has to attain before they can paint certain things and that's got nothing to do with us white blokes at all. Out of respect for him and his customs I allowed Gunook to take the paintings away with him and we blew on a big fat scoob as everyone bid him farewell. Steve was quick off the mark to dig his index finger deep into my ribs chanting, *"All bow down to the Featherman"* *"Oh! Yea!"* *"The Featherman gonna get you"*.

After our encounter with Gunook I decided to call it a day with the ochre painting thing and get into something a little closer to my own cultural boundaries. Still on the theme of psychedelics I replaced the multi colored pallet of the ochre with high quality, felt tipped pens. Mandela's and other forms of sacred geometry became the new focus in my compelling need for spectral and prismic delight. One night I started drawing after an acid trip just to see what I could come out with and I was at it for two days solid. I kept giving myself little boosters of acid every few hours to stay awake then I crashed out exhausted for the next three days. When I examined what I had done in the clear light of day I concluded it was the worst load of shit I had ever spewed forth. I felt I really needed a break from everything. The delay with the assembly of the PA was really starting to get me down. It had been almost two months since I placed the order and there was no getting out of the deal because I had paid them a seven thousand dollar deposit. I wouldn't have been able to cope with the ordeal of taking them to court, so I just had sit and wait until the frigging thing was finished.

Early in the morning just before sunrise Lady and I were playing chase the stick in the surf out near Ochre cove. I was starting to get a little clearer in my head after the big acid binge and the simplicity of just playing with the dog was enough to satisfy. As I bent down to pick up the stick in the half light I detected a movement in the corner of my eye, high in the dunes to the west. It looked like a well built male and he was holding some kind of implement. I couldn't make out all of the details of his form, just half a silhouette against the bushes. There had been talk of people shooting wildlife among the locals in Moana so I wasted no time in putting as many sand dunes as I could between myself and this mysterious individual. I called lady over to where I was standing near a sandstone outcrop but she had other ideas. She had spotted the person who was by now walking down the slope and she darted off in his direction.

The light had increased by the time I came in view of her and she was rolling around at the feet of the stranger being patted and played with. As the first blinding rays of the sun broke the horizon I could make out that it was just an old branch the bloke was holding probably to use as a walking staff. We greeted each other with a friendly good morning and I detected a foreign accent in his voice. As I was going up the sloped towards them I passed a one man tent that was perched in a bushy flat between a couple of sand dunes. Our initial conversation was about the horrible swarms of mosquitoes that come out at night but it soon swung around to who each of us was over hot coffee beside his tent. I was completely awe struck by the knowledge I had stumbled upon a person who described himself as an 'Anthropological artist' and equally blown away when he informed me that he was in Australia working on a project funded by the Tate gallery in London. That's the big league in anybody's language. His name I was to discover was Nicholas Lang from Heidelberg in Germany. As we sat drinking coffee and talking he reached into his tent and produced a folded over corn flakes box. I thought he might be going to roll up some exotic brand of smoko but it turned out to be a fossilized emu egg that he was re-constructing with super glue. He continued with stories of his recent travels as he tinkered away with the egg and I was quite impressed by how he could work on such a delicate and fragile thing while still maintaining a conversation. The greatest shock to my system came when he told me the reason he was in this particular spot. It was because of the ochre. Fuck me sideways. This was too much of a cosmos shaking coincidence for me to comprehend before breakfast. I felt instantly connected to Nicholas in an artistic way, like a comrade in some kind of renaissance conspiracy. He was equally surprised by the fact I had been gathering the ochre and using it as my main medium of expression. I think we both knew instinctively that there was a reason for our connection and the purpose was revealed as the conversation continued. His mission at Ochre cove was to excavate sites into the sandstone crevasses and transfer the colored vein, onto wooden and hemp gauze frames. Once this had been achieved he intended to go to the Flinders Ranges in search of a sacred red ochre mine that had been lost in a landslide over one hundred and forty years ago.

Mind boggling shit indeed!

When I enquired how Nicholas intended to journey into the Flinders Ranges he pulled out his maps and pointed at an isolated railway siding up past Hawker at the foot of the ranges. As he described how he intended to hike the long distance from the railway depot into the ranges in the blazing heat of summer the purpose of our connection was suddenly revealed. He was to be the master in this intriguing Anthropological genre I had started dabbling in and I would be his traveling companion and apprentice. I wouldn't hear of any offers of petrol money and the like as I donated my services to his mission and he in turn offered to supply all of the marijuana we would need for the trip.

As it turned out he did have some smoking gear tucked away in his tent and over a choof or two by his smouldering campfire we made plans for the ochre excavations that would commence at sunrise the next morning. I skipped along like some stupid kid as Lady and I made our way back up the beach towards home. I was smiling to myself at the sheer artistic majesty of the connection and at how truly impeccable the timing was. Joy and I were desperately needing a break from each other and an excursion into the Flinders Ranges was the perfect excuse to bail out of the relationship for a well earned break. I met up with Nicholas the following morning as we had agreed and it was straight to work after coffee and a joint with a backpack sized pick and shovel. By midday we had located the most suitable veins of multi colored ochre and we had shaved away all of the yellowy sandstone rubbish. The veins that Nick decided to transfer onto the frames after they were built looked almost like magnified views of opal. As we were scraping and digging away at one of the sites on our hands and knees a strange little visitation entered my thoughts and I was distracted by an amusing apparition in my minds eye. It was Gunook all doodied up in a traditional costume that could only have been that of, ... 'The Featherman' I almost jumped out of my skin. Instantly my thoughts turned to where I was and exactly what it was I was doing. I asked Nicholas as we worked if there was any kind of permission required for his project and he was quick to put my mind at ease. He had obtained an official permit from the Site Protection Officer before he even left Germany and the project had the full endorsement of the local Aboriginal Elders. Apparently they were pleased that someone was doing something to preserve the ochre for future generations to see. Where we were working had long since become a popular trail bike track and there were about six rusty old car bodies sitting around that had been pushed off the cliffs above. The following day after we completed the excavations Nick and I drove into the Adelaide hills in search of sapling pines to construct the frames that would hold the hemp gauze. We found the perfect patch just off the road in a government plantation and harvested all we needed for the task. On the way back to Moana we stopped at an industrial estate on the outskirts of Adelaide to get the roll of hemp fabric.

At a small hardware store he bought a spool of bailing twine and some epoxy resin which meant we were set to begin building the frames the following day. The structures we had to build came together exactly as Nicholas had envisioned them. He was extremely easy to work with as I followed his instructions and marveled at his unshakable sense of precision. The lengths of sapling pine were bound together with bailing twine to take the shape of three, six foot by four frames. Lengths of hemp gauze were then laid across one side of each frame and secured into position with small tacks. We glued the fabric into permanent position with epoxy resin and took the rest of the day off as the glue dried. We were sitting around relaxing after a good mornings work and Nicholas announced that he was right and the end of his pot supply.

We choofed on the final dregs of what he had left and the acquiring of some more smoko became the absolute priority of our focus. Being a foreign traveler he didn't really know anyone he could go to. The only people he had met in Adelaide were those at 'The Experimental Art Foundation' but he was hesitant to make enquiries among them because he was unsure of whether they were smokers or not. I knew a couple of dealers from the music game so we made a trip into the city in search of some laughing gear. Nicholas was extremely fussy about the quality he purchased and after we had investigated three of my contacts he was still not satisfied with what was on offer. In the end we managed to score a bag of what I thought was good weed from the university, but Nick was still claiming it was low grade "horse hay".

Early up the following day we placed the completed frames over the excavated sites. The rough hemp gauze on each frame was given a healthy smattering of epoxy resin before it was laid over a site and pressed hard into the sandstone surface. We gathered up anything we could from the junk that was sitting around to lean up against the back of the wet fabric. This was to ensure the glued hemp fabric would remain flat and the veins would lift away correctly. Nick said he wanted to leave it for at least three days before we attempted to detach the frames from the sites because any time before that they would not be dry enough. This suited me fine in light of the fact I had received news that my new PA system was ready to be picked up. I used the time I had away from Nicholas to do all of the stuff I had been neglecting while I was assisting him. The first job was to pick up the PA and get it to Moana beach, but first I had to under go extensive training from the resident technician on how the whole thing worked. Once I had a fairly good idea of the ins and outs of everything we loaded the various components into the van and I headed back towards the coast. The system was stacked in the van as if the two were designed for each other and there was still a bit of room left over for some traveling gear. Back at home base I stored the PA system in the pokey little dining room area of the flat and our living area started to look more like the back room of a music shop than anything you could flop out and relax in. The larger things like speaker cabinets, mixing desk case and amp racks lined the walls without depriving us of too much space, but the twelve microphone stands proved a real problem. In the end I buried them under our big old brass bed upstairs and they made a hell of a racket whenever Joy and I were doing the 'wild thang'.

In the three days it took for the glue to dry on the frames we were spared any serious downpours, so when Nicholas and I investigated the sites we were pleased to find them ready to start working on. The hemp fabric had remained relatively flat as the glue dried and the veins were now solidly attached, ready to be separated from the sandstone. We worked through the morning to lift the frames away from where they had been placed.

Nick went into little displays of pure delight as each one came free to reveal an identical image to the vein over which it had been laid. He was proud as punch at how the works had come out and no sooner were they completed before he started projecting our focus towards the forth coming trip to the ranges. I drove the van up the beach as close as I could to Ochre cove and we loaded the frames into the back. They were standing side by side and held in place with rope with Nicks camping gear neatly stacked next to them. He said goodbye to the cove and I drove back up the beach as carefully as I could so as not to risk damaging any of the pieces. After a short stop at the flat to say goodbye to Joy and to pick up the dog and my camping gear we went into the city. It had been arranged that the frames would be stored at 'The Experimental Art Foundation' headquarters and Nicholas was anxious to get them out of the van to a safer place. That evening we were surprised to find a gathering had been organized in Nicks honor. It was held in the gallery area of the E.A.F. and it was attended by the crème of the Adelaide art scene. A couple of lovely old aboriginal elders had been invited along and they gave stirring little speeches about how happy they were that the importance of Ochre cove had finally been recognized. The merriment progressed late into the night and those gathered were treated to a variety of performance art pieces, a string quartet and a number of other musical acts. The newly completed 'Ochre works' were hung in pride of place directly behind a small stage area. Nicholas was busy chatting with everyone there but his eyes were right there with me when I caught a wiff of some potent weed circulating in the crowd. When he was free of all the attention we conspired to spilt up into separate search parties to locate the source of the pot. We reconnected in an outside courtyard area that was a private chillout zone for the E.A.F. crew. Nick had already located the source and as I pulled up an easy chair he was being presented with a large brown paper bag full of grass. He stuck his nostrals deep into the bag and after a time withdrew them sporting an enormous smile. With those seated around him waiting in baited anticipation at what he was going to say he declared, *"Istvan, In the morning we leave for the ranges and we have a new traveling companion to take along."* He was holding the bag high in the air still grinning. I spent a total of three months in the company of Nicholas before he had to return to Germany. Our trip into the Flinders Ranges proved a success greater than that of Ochre Cove when he rediscovered the lost Bookatoo ochre mine and marked it's location for the anthropological history books. As Joy and I were seeing him off at the airport I was presented with a small ball of the sacred ochre in thanks for my assistance and he also left me with what remained of the pot. As he departed through the barriers I became quite emotional as I was hit by the magnitude of the experience we had shared. Our connection will always be treasured among my fondest memories and rate as the most significant event in my evolution as an artist.



CHAPTER TWELVE

THAT'S THE WAY I LIKE IT AH! HA!

I'm re-reading in detail all of the earlier chapters I wrote having not scrolled through them in ages. It's amazing the amount of spelling errors and punctuations I am correcting as I go. I'm finding it truly inspiring to re visit all of the real life events I lived through as a younger man and managed to capture in words on a computer amid all that was going on. It's really as if I'm experiencing my time all over again with each new forgotten episode that unfolds. The work I've been doing with Dale on the songs has been great to make me feel like a productive artist but writing this book is a whole new ball game. I've almost completely stopped watching videos and TV and I haven't been fishing for about a month. The last time I went out it was with Joey and amid periodic showers I pulled this hefty bream with a salted pilchard on the third cast, down at the spit junction.



**THERE YOU GO GIRLS. NOW YOU KNOW
WHAT I LOOK LIKE AS AN OLD FART.**

My strategy of looking for an opening in the music game disguised as a sound man got somehow put aside and most of my time was used up just being a roadie. It was hard to break away from that routine because I had started making real good money hiring out the PA to all the local bands. An opportunity to hit the road with a touring group came up and before I knew it my life became yet another travelling adventure.

Enjoy.



THE COLOUR MACHINE

No sooner had my apprentice to the grand master adventure come to a close before I was jumping headlong into a new role as a Roadie and PA hire man. With no prior experience in the game I figured the quickest way to come in contact with any potential customers was to hang out in the local music shops and keep my ear close to the ground. The strategy eventually paid off when a Maori Disco band came into one of the shops looking for a rig they could take on tour to Queensland. The proprietor of the shop informed them he was all booked out and he sent them looking for me. I was drinking coffee with Brad the resident guitar repair man in his workshop when the doorway was suddenly filled with cheerful of native faces. The band were called 'The Colour Machine' and they were desperate to hire a PA and operator so they could hit the road. They had tried every hire company in town to no avail and it was quite evident that I was their last resort.

Strike one!

The band wanted to leave for Queensland in five days, which meant a hell of a lot of organising to do if we were going to take the gig. A tentative deal was negotiated whereby I would provide the rig with a van and two operators if they agreed to pay me six hundred dollars a week, plus fuel and accommodation for a three person crew. I had worked out the basics of operating the system but as far as the finer points of sound scaping go I had a lot to learn. Joy's younger brother Roy was a sixteen year old, sound enthusiast and a technical whiz who was busting to leave high school. It seemed like a logical step to invite him along, but it would take some skilful diplomatic manoeuvring to get around his old lady. After the incident at the lion park in England Joy's mother thought that I was a complete and utter madman who couldn't be responsible for himself let alone any of her off spring. By the time we were scheduled to leave for Queensland the old cow had been sufficiently persuaded by Joy and the rest of the clan that her blue eyed boy should come on tour and further his sound engineering skills. It was agreed that I would pay the lad one hundred and fifty dollars a week plus meals and accommodation and I would do my best to protect him from the drug crazed side of rock and roll.

Strike two and smoking!

The bands first booking was in Newcastle at a place called Jolly Roger's Nightclub and from there we had a series of dates on the Gold Coast. By the time we completed the third gig Roy and I had settled into a reasonably smooth running work routine. Joy started helping us out with the loading and unloading of the gear and she also started getting into the sound mixing thing with Roy. She operated the lights for most of the shows and became quite proficient with time. Once the band were on stage shaking their booties and crooning the late night disco crowd there was nothing for me to do but get stuck into the top shelf bourbon and try to stay sober for the load out. I was itching to be on the stage myself, but travelling with these guys I had the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of the music game and get a first hand experience of fuck ups that can occur. The PA hire thing was the smartest move I could have made. I was getting less than a hundred bucks a week renting out the flat and there was a host of bullshit things to attend to like rates, insurance and ongoing repairs to the property. As a result of our new enterprise we were saving at least two hundred dollars a week and it was all coming in tax free. Mind you there were a number of recurring expenses that came with being the guy on the winning end of each gig. No sooner had the band handed over their PA hire fee they were in my pocket for loans and advances which were rarely ever retrieved. I didn't mind because I considered it easy money and I was selling a pile of pot to their disco dancing audiences. The band played mostly in tacky Gold Coast tourist dives that cater to the needs of the unselective masses. The gigs were so predictable that you could just about set your watch by them. The guys would be set up and playing by nine to a room that was empty except for the nightclub staff and ourselves. Then the tourists coaches would start rolling in one after another. They delivered an instant audience of mostly senior citizens who were wearing nametags and marvelling at the swirling disco lights. It was one drink at the bar like budgies at a watering hole, then one dance around the flashing dance floor before they were herded off by a tour guide for their next 'Surfers By Night' experience.

After just a few weeks of this artistically stagnant routine I decided that my mentors were correct in their assessment of the entertainment industry. I concluded that the glamorous world of show business is a tragic myth which only exists in the imagination of star struck punters who wish they could be celebrated notoriety. I'm quite sure that Lenny Bruce summed it up perfectly when he said, *"We are all victims of the Pop Culture"*. I don't think it would really matter if you were playing one night stands in down and out bars or travelling the world with a runaway hit, the principal is the same. Tapping your fingers and waiting long hours for the next curtain call is the most boring past time any self respecting adventurer could engage in. The bands Gold Coast gigs were booked by a Queensland Entrapment who was an obese and equally greedy pig of a man. He wore outlandish tropical shirts and smoked expensive Cuban cigars while most of the performers in his stable couldn't afford to buy a drink after the show.

He didn't give a flying fuck about the comfort of his bands let alone the roadcrew and if ever there was a complaint it was quickly silenced by the threat of a contract termination. Most of the time our accommodation was a single room which wasn't even big enough to shelter the boys in the band. More often than not Joy and I would end up sleeping in the van near the beach and Roy just crashed out wherever he landed. Eventually we were accommodated in a building that was one of the promoters many real estate holdings in the Gold coast area. Wherever possible the money grabbing parasite used to stick his touring bands in the houses that he bought and sold, thus saving a shitload of cash on their accommodation. Being the fat pounce he was the promoter never thought to take ancient tribal friction's into account and he made the near fatal mistake of housing a Samoan show band at the same address as the Maoris. The Colour Machine and crew had the use of the downstairs apartment and the Samoans were on the upper level. Joy and I slept on a foam mattress at the base of the stairwell and we had to contend with the God awful racket coming from just up the stairs. On one occasion the Colour Machine had just finished a gig at Burleigh heads where barely a soul turned up. We were as relieved as each other that it was over and all we wanted to do was sleep. The Samoans were pissed out of their brains and they stayed up till dawn singing and jamming in full gusto. 'Three Times a Lady' had just been released onto the airwaves and it seemed they had adopted it into their repertoire. They must have sung that friggin song thirty times before I politely called up the stairwell and asked them to keep it down. The following morning we were abruptly woken by the sound of shouting upstairs. The next thing I knew there was a big, ugly Samoan conga player standing over our bed hungover and mean as a junkyard dog. He was in a vein bursting uproar and screaming, "If I did not respect this lady bro, ...I would kill you, . right now". The monster standing over us said in a matter of fact way that he had two more gigs to do before he finished his bookings and he didn't want to risk damaging his fingers. When however the gigs were done he declared that he was going to rip me into to little pieces. He suggested if I knew what was good for me, I wouldn't be around when he came back down the stairs then he turned on his heels to leave.

FREAK OUT! AH HA!

Big Mark the lead singer in the Maori band must have been woken by the early morning racket and a disgruntled, "Shut the fuck up" came thundering down the hall from his room. The Samoan increased his step up the stairs and Joy now much whiter than her normal fair toned self said, "let's go and stay in a motel until those idiots are gone". At morning coffee I described the scene that took place between myself and the conga player not quite realising the explosive wick I had ignited. Nui the muscle bound kit drummer was the first to fire up and the other band members weren't far behind him.

Robbie who was the oldest and most stable of the lads sensed there was trouble brewing and suggested that Joy and I make ourselves scarce until the feud blew over. We were only too happy to take his advice so we gulped down our coffee and split the scene. We spent the day just hanging around on the beach and killing time, waiting for the Samoans to leave for their show. On our return to the house we found that all hell had broken loose and a full blown tribal brawl had taken place in our absence. The house both upstairs and down resembled something that had been caught in the path of a hurricane. Apparently Nui had raced up the stairs with a knife and slashed his arm which in the Maori culture means a formal declaration of war. The conga player was thrown out of an upper story window along with his belongings and the rest of the Samoans were evicted like wise. The promoter on hearing the details of the clash billed both bands for the damage to his property and all concerned parties were put on notice that if there was any more trouble our bookings would be scrapped.

It's quite funny in a way because that fight guaranteed employment for the band beyond their existing series of dates. None of them could afford to hand over any consequential amounts of cash so it was agreed that a percentage would be deducted from their future earnings. The Maoris were given the use of another building at Currumbin beach which was known as the Newcastle flats and it was not inhabited by any tribal foes. Currumbin is where the boys first discovered goldtops or magic mushrooms as they are more commonly known. Every second day or so the lads would get me to drive them out to the cow paddocks where the mushies were growing and they wouldn't come home until we had filled a whole bucket at least. The mushrooms were boiled up in a big pot and the highly concentrated liquid was used to make coffee for the crew and their guests, all day long. There were people tripping left right and centre and the place took on a sort of festival vibe that was spiced with spontaneous jam sessions and much jovial abandon. The Maoris were a great bunch of guys and excellent musicians who often played for the pure pleasure of it between their gigs. They welcomed my vocal input when they were jamming and through those sessions I discovered the magic of funky indigenous rhythms. After about a week of constant tripping I found the distinction between night and day became irrelevant. They were merely passing events in one continual unfolding party.

The band had another six days before they were booked to start gigging and at the rate we were going it would take that long for us to come down. I was started to ease back on the dosage but the others just kept pouring down the mushie juice like it was lolly water. Their favourite game when we were out searching for mushrooms was to play spot the creepy crawly. In New Zealand there isn't the variety of reptilian wildlife that we take for granted in Australia, so the first one to spot a stumpy tailed lizard or the like would call the others over to huddle around and view the creature. One time I spotted a big green tree frog perched in some branches near a creek.

I called the lads over to have a look and they were so blown away by the animal they kept it as a pet. It seemed the most fun the guys could have when they were at the peak of a trip was to play with that damn frog. Like wonder struck children they took turns to hold the thing and all would laugh in a hearty chorus as it dangled by a sticky green fist from the finger of a chuckling Maorie. With only two days to go before our first gig I decided it was time to pull right back on the mushie's. As we charged up on morning coffee I declared to the crew that it was going to be my last day of tripping. I advised all present that they might start thinking about doing likewise and instantly became the target of the collective scorn. As a reward for my straight assed little comment I was forced to drink another cup. They all leaned around me at the breakfast table chanting, "Drink it all up Freddy" and giving me affectionate little prods until it was gone. I laughed off the sudden and unexpected doubling of my dosage but two hours later the effect came thundering home like a daytime nightmare. Previous bouts of excess hinted that I might be in for a bumpy ride but what I experienced made everything else look tame. I was laying on a bean bag in the front room listening to records and riding the first waves of phsyllisiben as they started to wash in. My eyes were closed and I was seeing how long I could hold the bright mandala like image that remained after I pulled down the blind. The final flash of sunlight flickered before my minds eye for what felt like an eternity and it assumed a variety of shapes and forms before fading to a distant point of light. From the vanishing point to which it had gone the orb of pulsating light changed to a tone of pale blue then bright purple. As it came back towards me it assumed a deity like form which was the horizontal silhouette of my own body levitated in a psychedelic prism. I was floating inside a pyramid of swirling colours surrounded by ever changing 'Escher'esqu' shapes. They hovered above my suspended form like animated, crystalline beings who were trying to communicate. It was as if a software package of computer generated images had decided to procreate and I was the chip which contained the psychedelic seed. I was immersed in a secret hidden dimension of beauty and spectacular glory where my physical being and the levitating silhouette were one. I guess I must have been so preoccupied by the swirling images in my head that I stopped paying any attention to the external environment in which I sat.

The music changed from the comforting cosmic tones of Tangerine Dream to the provocative and menacing poetry of young master Dylan. With a sudden jolt I was dragged away from my hallucinogenic hideaway and transported back to the realm of thoughts, concepts and ideas. Among the lyrics Dylan emphasised the word, "You" with a greater theatrical passion than I had previously noticed. With each statement by the screaming bard I was separated from the floating silhouette and once again it became a distant fading light. As before the orb returned but this time it was changing to dramatic shades of red, orange and purple as it emerged closer into view.

Gone were the pretty pastel colours of the psychedelic spectrum and now my internal visionscape was on fire. A monstrous entity loomed into the foreground and held me terror struck by the ghastly magnitude of his form. It was a ten foot high Chinese dragon with about thirty heads and twice as many lashing claws. Whenever the word, ... "You" came bellowing out of the record player the beast pointed straight at me with a cluster of sharply clawed fingers. The outer coat of the dragon was covered in red scales but for some strange reason there were pink strawberries growing where it should have had knuckles. They were oozing a bright yellow, sticky slime that smelt like mushrooms and made me almost throw up. I opened my eyes with the expressed intention of deleting the image out of existence but the terrible apparition of my accuser was still there. A fleeting particle of reason must have blown into my ear and I made the conscious connection that I had been staring deep into a Chinese lantern. It was covering the overhead light and reflecting happy little dancing dragons all around the room.



NOW TELL ME ... HOW DOES IT FEEL?

TO BE ON YOUR OWN ... LIKE A COMPLETE UNKNOWN ...

WITH NO DIRECTION OR HOME ... LIKE A ROLLING STONE.

BOB DYLAN.

Something moved in the corner of my eye. I shifted my gaze to witness the hydraulic doorstopper popping out metal legs like some kind of robot lobster or alien crayfish. It dislodged itself from above the door and proceeded to circumnavigate the room like a hungry mechanical insect. After it's little wander around the room the creature returned to the door and resumed it's normal function, as I observed in awe and tried to ignore the first nagging ache of strychnine poisoning. There was a poster hanging on the wall which depicted the four horsemen of the apocalypse riding through an ancient mist and charging into battle. The mist began to swirl and the characters became animated and even more sinister as they rode towards me.

I ducked out of the way of a swinging bludgeon only to be narrowly missed by a fast moving spear. I made it to my feet and headed for the door which had become the gaping jaws of a pre-historic reptilian predator. The boxed in confinement of the room was left behind as I made my way down the stairs at the speed of a valium affected sloth and stumbled towards the ocean. I dived into the surf and surrendered to the calming embrace of the water, but I didn't stay in long for fear of hungry, lurking perils. The lads were further down the beach and it looked like they were playing touch football. As I got closer I saw that they were throwing mock karate blows to each other from about thirty feet away. As each received a blow he would go down in a deliberate fall and all would laugh in chorus. They were having so much fun so I joined in the game and ended up rolling in the sand with them. I laughed until I vomited and what had started out as a bum trip became a rollicking, physical beach tumble. The intensity of the trip subsided with the dawn of a new day and I greeted the morning light more fragile than the web of a micro-scopic spider. As I drifted back into normal consciousness I searched for the meaning behind the experience and came up with some surprising interpretations. The image of the big red, many fingered dragon was the symbol of my, ... 'Alter Ego Policeman'. He was only spitting accusations at me because that's his job and I wouldn't have created him if I didn't need it. The crawling mechanical crayfish was the symbol of my self doubt and that's why he appeared as a sneaky, scavenging parasite. The four horsemen who chased me onto the beach were the symbolic representations of my lower being and the destructive aspects of self that could cause my fall.

Anger ... Indulgence ... Insincerity and Jealousy.

That trip brought home the unescapable truth that the role of rock and roll roadie was not a vocation I could dedicate my life to. Each of the shows we did had been a thankless task and I drank like a trooper to dull away the mundane slog of my working life. Sure I had become an enterprising young businessman who was carving a path into the music game but the routine of constant gigging made me feel like any other mug who is trapped in the slow moving treadmill of the daily grind.

As I pondered my reality further it occurred to me that I had already achieved my purpose. I had explored behind the scenes more than enough to know what sort of a shitfight I would be letting myself in for and now I was just hanging around getting more artistically frustrated by the day. I guess the threat of physical violence just comes with the territory of travelling with a working band but the big tribal battle weighed heavy on my soul and made me seriously question whether the money was worth the grief. The brawl with the Samoans was the climax to a series of explosive situations caused by life on the road and my instincts told me that I needed to find a new adventure. A new romance might be on the cards as well.

Joy was fed up with living out of a suitcase and our normal mode of solidarity was lost in a minefield of volatile emotions. Instead of offering each other sanctuary against the stresses of the day we started having more and more of those niggling squabbles that all discontented lovers tend to engage in. I tried to console her as best I could but the growing distance between us was becoming more evident by the day. As these revelations came thundering home I started making some firm decisions about my next move.

I kept to myself for most of the day just formulating plans and trying to work out the best way to break the news to all who were involved. In the end I just came out with it around the evening meal and told the whole crew that I wanted to go to Sydney so I could pursue my own musical career. The guys were pissed off by the news but I offered to pay for the first two weeks hire of a new PA which helped to settle the tension. Joy had not been consulted at all on my decision and it caused friction between us the likes of which I had not endured before. Like a hen pecked husband I assured her that we would get more gigs in Sydney and Roy wouldn't be out of a job but they didn't hide the fact they were annoyed by the sudden change of plans. With our assistance the band scored a new PA and operator the very next day and a no hard feelings vibe was present as we exchanged friendly goodbye's.

'Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! ... Stayin Alive, Stayin Alive ...

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! ... Stayin Alive!'

A cartoon illustration of a mop with a long wooden handle and a grey, fringed head. The mop is leaning against a grey bucket filled with blue water and white bubbles. More bubbles are rising from the bucket. A small puddle of blue water is on the floor next to the bucket. The background is white with faint grey squares. The word 'shutterstock' is written in a black box at the bottom left.

A cartoon illustration of a mop with a long wooden handle and a grey, fringed head. The mop is leaning against a grey bucket filled with blue water and white bubbles. More bubbles are rising from the bucket. The entire scene is set against a plain white background.

A cartoon illustration of a mop with a long wooden handle and a grey, fringed head. The mop is leaning against a grey bucket filled with blue water and white bubbles. More bubbles are rising from the bucket. The entire scene is set against a plain white background.

So crack open cold one and put your feet up as I describe my brief brush with a life of celebrity and fame. I'll leave your name on the guest list for tonites show and I'll see you back stage after the gig. Nah! Don't bother to thank me it's the least I can do. I mean without his fans a 'Rock God' is nothing and, ... *'Hey is that a gram I can see down there on the floor?'*." Listen, while you're down there babe would you mind wrapping your lips around this? And try not to leave any stains on my jeans honey I'm trying to appear available."





BIG SMOKE CITY

Joy and I had to start dipping into our land deposit savings to finance the southbound journey which meant she was counting every bloody cent along the way. It's almost as if she tried to make me feel guilty every time I bought a bottle of beer or a little bit of pot. To keep the peace I just grinned and wore it as we clipped away the miles between us and the bright lights of Sydney. On our arrival in the big smoke we crossed the Harbour Bridge towards the city and I spotted the silver flashing underbelly of a plane banking away between sunset reflected sky scrapers. The only other time I had seen this place was when we departed on our flight to Europe and the dazzling majesty of the departing aircraft seemed like an appropriate coincidence to highlight the moment of our arrival. The city lights were flickering to life all around us and it felt great to be entering Old Sydney Town and the gateway to my musical dreams.

We spent our first night in Sydney camped down by the water at the Spit Junction on the northern beaches. The PA was packed tightly into the van along with all our other gear so we just spread our blankets out on the beach and slept under the stars. The next morning promised another stinker so we were up early to beat worst of the traffic and the heat. My main objective was to find somewhere to store the PA so we could camp in the van while hunting for another place to live. At an overpriced seaside cafe I phoned around to a few storage companies but they were all too far from the centre of town. I needed the rig to be close at hand if I landed a gig so I decided to come at the problem from another angle. We were sitting at a stoplight in Mosman when I noticed a friendly looking priest clipping some morning blossoms in the gardens of his church. I did a quick left turn and pulled over across the road. His name was Father Peter Blair and he listened with genuine interest as I told him of our predicament. He cringed in horror when I lamented that my poor girlfriend had been exposed to scenes of uncontrolled violence at the hands of marauding natives. I didn't really get to finish my exaggerated little rave before he was offering the use of shower facilities, instant hardship payments and of course we could find somewhere to store the tools of my trade.

'BINGO!, ... AND PRAISE BE, ... GOOD BROTHER'

The church committee let us store the PA system at the back of a church hall that was used for jumble sales and the like. It stayed there for about a week under lock and key and they let us leave it there absolutely free of charge. Every time we popped in to take a shower Father Blair presented us with food packages that came courtesy of the ladies guild. Our daily search for a home base eventually proved fruitful and we moved into a share accommodation with a couple of freaks in French's Forest. It was only a two bedroom house so Roy got to camp in the van and Joy and I had the welcomed luxury of our own room. Within two days of moving into our new address I scored my first gig with an underground rock cabaret act known as 'D Minor and the Dischords'. The venue was called 'French's wine bar' in Darlinghurst which was an early punk culture hangout and I spent most of the night trying to keep excited youngsters from jumping on the speaker boxes or spilling their drinks all over my amp rack. I found out very quickly that the first thing an inner city roadie has to learn is how to maintain an easy going yet authoritative presence around out of control teenagers.

If the kids have got it in for you they can fuck up your equipment in no time, so you've got to appear as if you are part of their tribal scene. Within weeks of our arrival the bookings started coming in on a regular basis. Most of the gigs we scored were one night stands with a diverse cross section of Sydney bands which ranged from hard core garage punks to sophisticated night club combo's and everything in between. Working with so many different types of acts provided a valuable opportunity to acquire musical contacts so I started filling my little black book with names and addresses. As well as a number of recording company executives I gathered the names of some freelance players with whom I might be able to start my own band. At the rate I was going I figured I would only have to play the role of the shit kicking Roadie for another couple of months and then I would be ready to start focussing on my own musical career. A plan was established between Roy and myself that when I was ready to go into rehearsals he would take over as the manager of the PA business. The rig would be available for my practice sessions two days a week and the rest of the time he could hire it out and receive a fifty percent share of the profits. He was head over heels with excitement when I promoted him to the position of a business partner and overnight he developed a healthy interest in the art of drumming up trade. A new influx of clients filled the books and we found we were able to get more selective about which bands we wanted to work with. Some of the better ones we hired the rig to were Midnight Oil, Chain, John English and The Stevie Wright Band. Joy stopped coming to the gigs not long after we got established in Sydney. She didn't like the hectic pace of the nightlife and besides she had become very self conscious about the scars on her face. I tried to convince her that they were barely noticeable but it was all to no avail. Were the truth known the scars had become a bit of a turn off for me in bed and I'm pretty sure that she sensed it. The tension was unescapable between us and our once active sex life came to a standstill.

She became so protective of our land deposit savings that I started to wonder if her nesting instinct was the only thing keeping her around. To get around Joy's obsession with saving money I started dealing pot on a much larger scale which allowed me an independent income. I just payed the bills from week to week with no questions asked while Joy sat dreaming of green pastures and a second chance at motherhood.

Yikes!

The temptations of dancing female flesh can cause the most noble of men to stray and it wasn't long before I was inventing bullshit stories to explain my movements just like the next dirty, two timing loverboy. It seemed like Joy and I were only together out of habit and eventually something had to give. I had too much on my plate to embark on any kind of emotional bust up, so I just buzzed around madly in the megopolis and dreaded the times that I had to go home and face those awful vibes. It got to the point where we didn't converse about anything interpersonal because it was just too explosive a subject. Just like any doomed couple we only connected to consolidate the household bills and other mundane affairs and should any detail concerning our relationship creep into the dialogue it was promptly avoided on my way out the back door.

After a couple of months of constant searching I had recruited almost enough players to call my first rehearsal. The drummer I settled on was a guy called Jim who was an inner city barfly I had met at chequers night club. On Jim's recommendation his mate Johnny was invited to play bass and they formed as tight a rhythm section as any band could need. The keyboard player was a bloke called Peter and he was a seasoned veteran of the music game who had worked with the renowned blues singer Wendy Saddington some years before. The eventual line up was intended to include two guitarists who could double on rhythm and lead but as yet only one had been found. His name was Gwyne and he was a dirty slide blues man, better than most on the scene at the time. Through Gwynes playing I got in touch with the true essence of my most suitable vocal style which is rhythm and blues based rock spiced with country feels. The end of year silly season had commenced and there were a lot of crazy people around getting up to one kind hedonistic mischief or another. It was a hot and bouncing Saturday night at the old 'Hopetoun Hotel' in Surry Hills and 'Mental As Anything' were on the stage hamming it up. I was out on the footpath smoking a joint and keeping an eye out for any likely pot customers, in the hope I might be able to afford a gram of the mind snapping speed being sold around the pool table. At certain venues you used to be able to get away with choofing a scoob in the vicinity of the pub and it was a great way for a dealer to advertise his wares.

A lavishly attired Drag Queen strolled over and brazenly plucked the joint from my fingers. He took a man sized drag and said, "Thanks mate" in a shameless masculine tone. I took a second look and realised it was not an actual Queen, just some drunken prankster who had decided to get dressed up like a chick. Under the heavily caked on layers of face paint I realised it was a guy I had jammed with at the Bondi Lifesaver some time before. His name was Ian and he was an expatriate New Zealander living in Australia. From what I had seen of his playing he was a versatile and solid contender so I asked him what he was up to musically. He blurted out in a slurred attempt at femininity that he was, "Desperate for a gig" at which we both chuckled knowingly. We were joined in that moment by his very attractive girlfriend Parrissa. She was drunk as well and dressed in the cutest little white ballerina's tutu. Parrissa zoomed in on our conversation as if she was missing out on something important. On hearing that I was preparing to form a band she let me know that she could do lead or backing vocals, whatever the gig required. They were fun loving people who knew how to have a good time and we partied into the night like a gaggle of long lost pals.

I scored a gram of speed from the pool room which saw us stealing the show on the dancefloor of the Tivoli as INXS did their thing. I got us all backstage after the show which most certainly would have left a good impression with my new party animal companions. I let the following day slip by nursing a chronic hangover and I didn't even remember to phone Ian as I had said I would. I figured if he and his girl felt half as bad as myself then they would also need a day to recover. The following day I contacted the number Ian had given me, only to find it had been cut off. I remembered him mentioning a squat at the end of Glebe Point Road where there was some rehearsal space available, so I jumped in the van and drove there hoping to track him down. I was in luck. Ian and Parrissa lived in the top level of the squats which was the disused office block of a large, pine scented timber yard. The densely populated dwelling was inhabited by musicians and an assortment of other artists. It was perched right on the waterfront across the water from Victoria Road and it was known by all as Fed Art. The squat dwellers were head to head in battle with the local council over plans to demolish their home and develop the area as a recreation park. A petition was circulated in attempts to try and save it as a community based cultural facility and regular benefit concerts were held in a large downstairs area. This was the space that Ian had spoken of when we first met and it suited my needs perfectly. Ian and I studied the weekly rehearsal schedule for the groups who practiced in the space and we worked out that the best time for us to use it was on the weekends. The other bands were generally off gigging which meant we would have the place to ourselves. Ian was free to start working so I made a tentative booking to hire the room on the forthcoming Friday night. There was a pay phone in the upstairs kitchen on which I called each of the other musicians to see if they could make it.

All had nothing better to do so I confirmed the booking with Ian and dropped a thirty dollar contribution into the biscuit tin on the fridge. Over neatly stacked cones of Nambucca heads and some squat community home brew Ian and I embarked on our first exploratory music session in his pad overlooking the water. We conversed about the best cover versions on which we might build an act as he tinkled on the strings of his electric guitar. Our tastes in music turned out to be very similar. We agreed that the majority of the players I had assembled were no frills, four on the floor rockers who were most in there element playing up tempo, traditional feels. Peter and Ian were more diverse in their musical knowledge and this it was hoped would provide some much needed contemporary tones for the repertoire. A list of about twenty songs were plucked out of the air which ranged from whisky drinking favourites like 'Bad to the Bone' and went to sweet melodious ballads like 'Lying Eyes'. The closest we got to any kind of heavy metal was 'Sweet Child in Time' which just happened to fit with the direction we wanted to go. Ian knew the basic chords to most of the songs but he was unsure of the overall musical arrangements so we spent that night and the following day stop starting on each piece until we locked them in.

Then we began the harrowing task of matching them to keys that would suit my voice. By the time Friday night came around Ian had a pretty good understanding of the music structures and he felt confident he could guide the rest of band through them. The rehearsal area was a homebuilt, ply board stage which acted a bit like a trampoline in certain spots and was adorned with graffiti murals and other rebellious, urban art. Stage lights were permanently situated among the high metal rafters of the hall which gave the impression more of a soundcheck for a gig than a practice session. As our first official rehearsal got underway we found that all but Peter were concerned about the commercial nature of the songs Ian and I had selected. There was enough hard hitting material in the mix to keep the majority of them happy, but they were hesitant about the complex vocal harmonies they would have to perform. Ian was an accomplished front man in his own right so he was quite at home singing backing vocals. Likewise was Peter and the final touch of Parrissa's voice produced a sweet sounding chorus of rich, earthy sounds. All were excited by what was coming out as we mastered each song and before the night was through we had most of them in the bag. Our practice sessions became regular weekend events around the squats and we were never short of an audience because the front entrance of the building led right into our rehearsal space. There was an unending stream of human traffic passing through because someone from upstairs was dealing high grade hashish and heads. Most other party aids could be scored around the place as well and one time we had the drug squad come thundering in the door half way through a song.

Most of the time our practice sessions were like private gigs for those commuting through the place and they were always unpredictable affairs. There were constant interruptions of one kind or another which invariably stemmed from the internal politics of the Fed Art Collective. Certain 'New Age' types within the community wanted to use the space on the weekends for self improvement workshops, but the majority of the inhabitants were meat and potatoes musicians who saw things differently. One time we were confronted by a primal therapy group who were extremely heated up and claimed we were monopolising the space. They insisted on being allowed to do a workshop in the unused section of the room, right there and then, while our rehearsal was taking place. They claimed that their vocal expressions would not be heard over our amplified music, then they stormed off to the back of the hall to conduct their workshop. The twenty strong group formed a large circle and taking it in turns they commenced to plead with their perspective mummies and daddies to give them the love they had not received as children. Each of them let out blood curdling screams which were intended to free them from the haunting grip of some tortured childhood scene. The racket they were making made it impossible for us to concentrate whenever we stopped playing to talk about the arrangements and besides, the lads and I were laughing so much we found it impossible to stay focussed on what we were doing.

It was decided in a mood of forced tribal tolerance that we should pack it in until our workspace intruders had rid their souls of those terrible, howling demons of self pity. Ian extracted some home brew from the fridge behind the stage area and reached for his acoustic guitar. Jim disconnected his snare drum and we all went down by the water to escape the noise of the intruders. It was here under a streaky, urban smog sunset that the lads began to nurture the first embryonic rhythms of their original sound. As they jammed away it became evident the band were capable of greater musical feats than the cover versions we had rehearsed. Everyone had original ideas and these it seemed are what they most wanted to pursue. After much passionate debate on the subject Ian suggested that once perfected the songlist should only be used as a sideline to attract a regular paying gig. The rest of the time we should concentrate on our own material because that's where the, *"Real money is"*. All agreed and it was settled that when we had written and recorded enough original songs the list of covers would be scrapped. Fuck me sideways and I thought that I was calling the shots. Democracy it seemed had sent me tumbling from my high horse so I decided to just go with the flow and live with the final outcome. The accumulated talent was too good to lose through mere details and the potential of those guys was such that they could play Jingle Bells and it would have been a hit. I found it took a giant leap of faith to let go of the familiar old cover versions and venture into unknown musical territory. I had never written a song in my life and I was suddenly thrown into the greatest challenge of my artistic evolution.

I had books of poetry stuffed away in a cupboard somewhere but as yet I had not tried to put any of the words to music. My most immediate point of reference was the blues based, jam sessions I had been involved in where I just sang the first thing that popped into my head. Now enthusiastic onlookers were expecting me to develop precise vocal melodies through which I could convey my inner thoughts and feelings.

If only they knew

The guys were aware that I was running on pure instinct so they were sensitive to my lack of musical expertise. After each plugged in experimentation we sat around listening to rough, four track recordings and my raw, explorative vocal jams were dissected to locate the appropriate melody. Peter and Ian took me aside for separate composition workshops and quickly scribbled lyrics were placed among melodies wherever they would fit. My dusty old stack of poetry provided the central idea for many of the songs and once I had isolated the main theme it became like a Christmas tree upon which I could hang a swag of new words. The most fun was coming up with hooky chorus lines to compliment the verses and give each piece a memorable singalong feel. Most of the songs were about romance and heartbreak in some way or another and I knew that I had to strive for a greater degree of substance. I wrote constantly to come up with more mature lyrical ideas and as a result new melodies started blossoming forth. Before long I could simply sing the lines that I had composed to the band and they would locate the accompanying chords. Most of that early stuff didn't make it into my current catalogue, but they served their purpose at the time to get us up and running as a composition team. Our official debut for the band was a benefit gig at Fed Art. We played alongside many of the other performers who were associated with the place and it was an absolute, howling hoot. It would have been nice if we were playing on a different stage for our first gig but the room was packed to the rafters with party people and they cheered us on from the word go. Ian, Parrissa and I dropped ecstasy tabs before the show and hefty slugs of tequila were thrown back with salt and lemon. Countless crates of home brewed coopers were turned on for the festivities and we were as loose as long necked geese by the time we hit the stage for the first set. I don't think anybody noticed how sloppy we were playing because the whole place was just as out there as we were. People were jumping onto the already cramped stage area and screaming stuff like, ... "Save the Squats" and, "Fuck the fucking council" into the microphone. I was in no state to rumble with those hostile punters, so I withdrew to the sidelines and let them have their way. Taking the chaos of the moment as my cue I jumped from the stage and moved in on a sexy young brunette who had been putting out the signals during the last couple of songs. After a brief and inviting little dance we vanished out the back into the abandoned woodyard and fucked each other brainless as the throbbing pulse of hard core sounds banged out of my PA.

I made it back to French's forest two days later and Joy was nowhere to be found. All of her belongings were gone and the word 'Cunt' was scrawled in red lipstick on the bedroom mirror. Nick and Suzie were the couple who we had been sharing the house with. Almost apologetically they said that Joy had left for the bus depot the previous morning and she was in a terrible rage. Apparently she had decided at the last minute to go to the benefit concert and she must have arrived while I was on stage. From somewhere deep in the lustful, ecstasy driven crowd she must have seen me spiriting the girl away and that was it. Initially I shrugged Joy's departure off as an inevitable occurrence but a nagging sense of pain began to emerge in the days that followed. I knew that I had deeply wounded a close friend who I had shared special moments with and a crippling depression set in that rendered me incapable of functioning properly. At the bands next rehearsal I found it difficult to stay focussed on the arrangements in the songs. My heart was just not in it and blind Freddy could have seen how low in spirits I was. Joy's absence hit me with more gravity than I had imagined it would and my work was being affected to a noticeable degree.

Ian suggested that we should take a break from practicing and smoke some cones until I was feeling more like singing. Peter, being well accustomed to the emotional ups and downs of performers said that these things take time and there was no point in hitting the gig circuit unless we were all in top form. The rest of the guys agreed and it was decided that the next few rehearsals would be dropped until I was more in the mood for performing. We arranged to recommence the sessions in three weeks time, then all but Ian and I departed for the pool table at the local boozier. After the others had split Ian sat me down for a brotherly chat. He listened to my woeful lamentations as we knocked over his stash of Bundy rum, then he commenced to give me an outside perspective on the situation. As he saw things the romance between Joy and I was doomed from the word go. She wanted domestic bliss, kids and security while I was destined to take the music world by the balls and shake it. In a most intoxicated and theatrical bout of passion he described how we were travelling in different orbits and no amount of tears could change it. What was done was irreversibly done and there was no point in trying to patch things up. At the end of the day he said, *"all it really meant was a convenient fast track to freedom"*. In my drunken, selfpitying stupor I explained how Joy and I had been through a lot together but it all went haywire when we travelled overseas. I felt a secret guilt for causing the dreadful scars on her face and I knew in her heart of hearts she blamed me for it as well. There was an underlining hostility between us most of the time and I couldn't continue living with that kind of knot in my guts. I knew Ian's home truths were correct so in a mood of fateful acceptance we polished off the last of the bottle and listened to Tim Buckley records until I crashed out shitfaced on his floor.

Roy started working the PA on the weekends and I only saw him for briefest of moments when he popped in to give me money. I bailed him up between gigs a couple of times to ask after Joy and he told me that she was staying at the bungalow in the Adelaide hills. I tried to call the house on numerous occasions, only to be told that she wasn't available. In the end I stopped trying and decided to leave any contact that might happen up to her. For a time Roy acted as our go between in my attempts to get in touch but he didn't really want to know about it. His relationship with me became strained in the process and I predicted that it might not be long before I had to start looking for another soundman. After a week or so of boozed up inactivity I found that I was climbing the wall so I phoned Ian and told him that I was ready to get back to work. The rest of the guys were just as keen to get started so we made arrangements to meet at Fed Art the following weekend. As it turned out Roy had taken a booking for the PA which clashed with the time we needed to use it. He kicked up a real stink when I told him to let the gig go and we had a heated barney at the entrance of the Steyne Hotel in Manly. Flexing his newly tattooed and work hardened young muscles he stormed off up the street in a huff, after telling me where I could stick my high and mighty attitude and my, *"Piece of shit fucking PA System"*.

I moved out of the house at French's Forest and took up residence in a flag pole rotunda at the infamous Imperial Hotel. My host was a nightclub buddy called 'Pedro' and he lived in a pre-fab hut that was part of a large, impressive roof garden. I suddenly had a sweeping million dollar view of Paddington and the local surrounds which cost me a mere fifty bucks a week. Pedro originally offered up the space to be used as a recording studio for the band, but I liked it so much that I moved in. I set up my four track recording rig and hi-fi equipment in one corner of the eight sided room and there was just enough space left to squeeze in a double bed. The lads used to complain about how pokey it was to work in but they loved coming over and getting up to mischief in the meat market just down the stairs. My pad was pretty much band property and it was used as the official boudoir for any unattached members who managed to score a root. There was a 'Boy's Club' routine in place that whenever the rotunda was being used for sexual purposes it was signalled by a set of red, yellow and green traffic lights situated in the doorway of the roof garden. There was an operating switch for the lights ingeniously hooked up at the foot of the stairs, behind the public phone and one was also installed in the rotunda. As a bonus to giving indication that a bit of the old 'in out' was taking place, the lights provided a fool proof warning system for my assorted drug transactions.



UP IN THE ROOF GARDEN

My new flatmate Pedro loved our music and as a result of his emerging entrepreneurial skills the owner of the pub agreed to try us out. The fat, greedy wanker declared in his 'I'm the king of the shitpile' way that he didn't want to run the night at a loss and our first gig had to be free. If it was up to scratch he said then he might consider letting us perform again. Before he turned his back on us and resumed cleaning beer glasses, he added that he didn't want to know about any original songs. At a following meeting of the band and the publican our list of covers was scrutinised in microscopic detail before he gave his final approval for the show to go ahead. As we were leaving his office the dribbling ponce was stating how none of us 'new bands' could ever compare to the likes of Perry Como and Frank Sinatra. After the meeting a heated discussion transpired around the pool table in the back bar, until finally the lads agreed to his rip off terms. It wasn't going to be a very equitable start to the collective enterprise but at least our introduction to the Sydney gig circuit would have begun. By making official our forthcoming 'first pub gig' it brought home the fact it was time for us to prove our worth in public. We were adequately rehearsed but we hadn't even settled on a name yet. Some half hearted tags had been thrown around like, '*Scruffy Mulligan and the Jet Setters*' or '*Claud Balls and the Electric Pranksters*' but no-one could really make up their minds. Some time earlier I had devised the name, '*The Neon Farm Boys*' largely due I suppose to the fact we had all originally come off a farm somewhere. The name had been stuck in my head ever since, so I proposed that it should be our working title. It was voted in five to one. The band were all regular patrons at the Imperial which meant we new most of the audience.

The over all vibe was familiar and jovial among the locals so we didn't have to bust our asses to win them over. The Saturday night crowd at our first Imperial gig gave us such a good reception that the publican reluctantly agreed to book us for another show. The second show went over just as well as the first and before we knew it we had a regular paying gig in the front bar. Things turned out pretty much as Ian had predicted. An ever expanding list of covers kept us playing the Imperial every third Saturday for about six months. Songs like 'Roadhouse Blues' and 'Born to be Wild' became our most requested and when we did 'All Along the Watch Tower' it was like the annual bash for the Jimi Hendrix fan club. Every now and again if the boss wasn't around we would hit the crowd with our most advanced originals. They were received with just as hearty an applause which gave us valuable feedback on their appeal. After a while the publican got wise to the fact we were playing our own stuff but he didn't make it an issue. It seemed as long as we delivered a greater percentage of beer swilling singalong favourites he let us have our way. The girl I had raced off at the benefit concert was a friend of Parrissa's from High school and her name was Sylvia. She was a wealthy young Jewish Princess from Saint Ives who dug our music and started turning up at the gigs with a swag of her rich girlfriends in tow.

As fate would have it the girls and the boys in the band hit it off like a laughing, bouncing litter of puppies until all were established with partners for the fun that lay in store. Ian and Peter were the only members of the band with permanent relationships which left Jim, Johnny, Gwyne and myself to party with the girls. They were all good lookers who complimented our collective image and the best part was they always insisted on buying the next round.

'I'm not in love so just forget it

'It's just a silly stage I'm going through'

With our success at the Imperial we were a bonified working act and this made it relatively easy to hook up with a booking agent. The band started doing one night stands in venues all over the metropolitan area and sometimes beyond the rural fringe. It seemed no sooner had I kicked off my cowboy boots and crashed out exhausted it would be time to get up and do it all over again. We played every drinking hole from Bondi to Bathurst and recruited a loyal following of headbanging pissheads along the way. A new Sound Roadie took Roy's place behind the front of house desk and my PA was acquisitioned as the bands permanent rig. I stopped making as much money as I did from being a freelance hire man but I was earning enough cash from gigging that it didn't really matter.

Among other successful family interests Sylvia's folks owned a chain of exclusive fashion outlets around Australia. They had spoiled the silly girl rotten since her birth and they continued to shower her with gifts and money into her adult years. She also picked up a substantial wage from managing their Centrepoin Tower boutique but she was the kind of girl who could never have enough. Myself and everyone else that Sylvia befriended was on the receiving end of her good fortune. She was not unlike myself when I received my compo payout but that was a mere flash in the pan compared to her unbridled generosity. I was probably too proud for my own good, but I started feeling like a gigolo whenever my girl shouted me out to impress her friends. A good humoured competition emerged between us and we actually started racing each other to pick up the tab. We both had expensive tastes which often saw me penniless broke between gigs. My land deposit savings shrivelled up like a sun parched oyster as we dined in exclusive restaurants and raged till the early hours in the most happening clubs in town. Sylvia's old man bought her a new Mercedes Benze convertible for her twenty first birthday, which she drove like a maniac and inflicted parking scratches on like a hell bent demolition driver. I never felt safe in the car with her but it was our best transport option because the van was in constant use for the band.

In a crafty manoeuvre to re-establish my independence at the wheel I bought a fully restored two door XP Ford Futura coupe. It was gun metal grey and it had shiny chrome mag wheels. Now that's the kind of sleek vintage saloon a budding young rock star should be driving. My new car suited our combined, glam rebel appearance and we never failed to get the rev heads howling at the lights. Sylvia soon came to enjoy being chauffeur driven in my 1950's dream machine because it freed her up to suck on UDL cans and sing stupid pop songs full blast in my ear.

'Girls just want to have fun'

With time it became apparent that our women folk were would be singers so after much pleading and cajoling we finally agreed to let them get up on stage with us. It happened at one of our less important gigs in the western suburbs and I must say they looked a lot better than they sounded as they grappled for words and the right notes to sing. That didn't really matter because the punters were up and dancing and our booking agent declared that it was a big plus for the group. Parrissa took the girls aside to give them some basic harmony training and within weeks they were good enough to get up at our bigger shows. A new band poster was silk screened into existence by the resident artists at the squats and it included, ...

'A Special Guest Appearance by The Neon Farmgirls.'

Our gigs doubled overnight because of the girls and an aura of shameless sexual energy started following us wherever we played. It seemed the hornier the late night crowds got the more they consumed at the bar and this meant we were a big hit with pub owners. Our weekly earnings increased and we were pretty much assured of constant work. Months of solid gigging started to wear us all pretty thin and the next band meeting saw a unanimous vote to take a break. Everyone was fucked out in one way or another from the merciless work schedule and the pressures of maintaining public interest were starting to take their toll. We all agreed that our originals had been well received on the electric stage so there was no better time get started on a debut album. I proposed a plan whereby after two months of rest and recreation the following three would be allocated to polishing up our best songs on the four track, in readiness for a larger studio situation. All agreed it was a good idea and the meeting ended with a renewed sense of enthusiasm for the future of the band. It would seem the work schedule I put forward was far easier said than done because the whole friggin circus slackened right off when the lights went out at the last gig.

The four track demo recording of twelve songs might sound simple enough in theory, but it proved a long and frustrating ordeal which tested the patience and dedication of everyone. It was almost impossible to get the band to recording sessions and when they did finally roll up it turned into a stoned and lethargic shit fight. It became such a thankless task in the end that everyone just gave up on it and went home. In the following months everyone headed in separate directions to pursue their own brand of fun. Ian and Parrissa went mountain climbing in New Zealand and Gwyne took a gig with Johnno's Blues Band, who were permanently stationed in Cairns. Peter went back to doing solo piano gigs in Kings Cross while Jim and Johnny became the rhythm section for a swing quartet in WA.

Fawle Eh! ... Go and get stubbed.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

4/11/2021



'I'M CLIMBING THE WALL HERE!'

What the fuck is happening man? Another god dammed complaint to my corporation landlords by none other than one of the new garden maintenance crew who have been appointed to replace the noisy little Indian fuck heads who used to wake me up at 7.30am in the friggin morning. Sheesh! There's a tall shrub poking out onto the path that I have to traverse each day to get in and out of the property from the street. When it rains the unpruned branches are weighed down with water and I get drenched if I brush against them or if they move with the slightest breeze. I was woken at the more acceptable time of 9.30 the other morning and I dragged myself out of bed so I could make a third attempt to get one of the workers to prune it back. There were garden blowers, whipper snippers and a large ride on mower going off all around the common area as I hobbled towards them on my walking stick and I stopped at the closest one I came so as to try and talk. At first the fuckwit just kept on going at it with his leaf blower and it appeared he was just going to ignore me. Through my speech impairment I managed to shout "Can we talk?" to which he begrudgingly turned around to face me. He had no intention of turning the blower off and I had to compete against it as I tried to communicate the problem of the bush with finger pointing and mock chopping hand gestures. I got a barely noticeable acknowledgement that he had picked up what I was trying to say so I turned around and went back home to bed.

When I got the email about the complaint from my property inspector I had to really rack my brain to remember if I had used any bad language and there was not a single thing I could think of. The best I can imagine is the garden attendant interpreted my hand movements and gestures as hostile or threatening in some way and he felt he had to report it. The bush was left untrimmed so I'm wondering if all three gardeners I spoke with digested nothing of what I was attempting to communicate. As far as I know they probably all believe that I am some mad old cunt who just likes to hassle the workers early in the mornings.

The email said that my landlords want to have another three way phone link up but in the meantime I am going to send them these words that I am writing to describe the incident. If that doesn't explain my side of the story nothing will. I think my tenancy lawyer made a positive step forward by applying for a review tribunal on my behalf which is due to take place in the new year. That will give him a chance to consult with my new anger management councillor so they can notify my accusers that I have commenced therapy. That's all fine but what of the fact I have been thrust back into a position of renewed uncertainty and stress through no fault of my own? My cardiologist is pleading with me to reduce anxiety in my life at all costs so if they find me cardiac arrested and stiffed out in my unit I'm gonna come back and haunt those hopeless pricks.

These present day introductions I'm placing in front of each chapter are a great way of getting all the annoying stuff I have to endure off my chest. It's also good therapy just knowing I still have the use of words to call on as my last remaining defence against the world. I suppose it's fitting that my fall from grace as a popular entertainer was followed by a gradual decline into the role of an aimless beach bum, drifter. Getting drunk, stoned and laid were to become my prime objectives between spontaneous jam sessions at parties and the like or stoned campfire gatherings down by the shore. The call to the north coast soon got the better of me and once there I found it the ideal setting to be just another anonymous punter at the bar.

NIMBIN A TOWN MADE OF DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

So much for hope and democracy in the land of musical dreams. The band failed to ever get back together and the most I ever saw of them was brief encounters in the clubs and bars. Even if we had wanted to follow through with the reputation we had started to build there were a number of other factors which might have caused our demise. To start with Fed Art was closed down in a highly emotive clash with the authorities which would have deprived us of a place to rehearse. The second was the fact that my PA system had been so severely thrashed it would have been cheaper to replace to whole rig rather than trying to repair it. The bands decision to ease back mid flight on our busy gigging schedule was the thing that killed the momentum and brought our thrill a minute runaway to a screeching halt. Just as fast as we had come together our quest for musical glory collapsed under pressure like a crumbling house of cards. The Rock and Roll locomotive we were riding went skidding off the tracks in an orgy of pointless indulgence and the collective fantasy was crushed in a pile of shattered musical dreams.

All of the young lovers were blown apart as the band fell from notoriety and the girls went off looking for a new source of fun. There were no stupid tears or broken hearts for Sylvia and myself just a clinical and detached understanding that each of us was free to pursue other options. We parted as friends and more worldwide companions as we drifted back to the singles scene, licking our wounds and consoling our bruised egos. After the last applause had subsided it took a bit of getting used to being just another nobody. I soon found out to my absolute dismay that the music industry doesn't give a flying fuck what you used to do, they are far more interested in how hot your product is right now. The thought of starting my dwindling career from scratch was too daunting an idea to even entertain, so I just decided to let the winds of chance blow me wherever they wanted me to go. In my pathetic attempts to maintain the appearance of a winner I ended up selling the broken down PA rig to a local music shop for about a third of what it had cost. With the sale it ended my time as an enterprising business man and gave rise to the pledge that I would leave the nuts and bolts side of the music game to those best suited to the job. The PA had been a technical nightmare from the word go due to shoddy craftsmanship but on reflection I can see that it wasn't a complete waste of time. In the two years I had been hiring it out the rig had probably paid for itself twice over and it had provided the perfect means by which I could be a part of the Australian music scene. In the time I was there however in the role of a stage roadie and then a high energy front man I saw enough to know for certain that following strict and demanding schedules is definitely not my style. With no PA to hire out anymore and no income from gigging to rely on, I found that most of my waking hours were spent distributing party aids in the pubs and clubs where I used to perform. At great risk to my freedom I went from selling humble twenty dollar sticks of pot to more hardcore commodities like, speed, cocaine and ecstasy among my friends and anybody else who wanted to score. In no time at all I was cashed up to the same degree I had been at the height of the bands success, but there was no sense of personal gratification associated with anything I did. I could feel my creative juices drying up like a shrivelled prune but I was so disillusioned by everything that I didn't really give a shit. As I did the rounds of the clubs and sold my wares I made a few half hearted attempt to recruit the local musos but nothing really ever came of it. The same magical spark wasn't there as it had been in the early stages of the band and it felt like I was trying to recapture a magic moment that was lost in the chilly winds of time. As much as I tried to reassure my battered ego that I was still a happening guy I found that I had no real sense of purpose without the band. Gone were the head banging crowd who cheered me on each night and gone too was the soaring brand of self confidence I had come to know.

I had no real reason to wake up in the morning other than to get people stoned and my illicit dealings provided the only excitement in an otherwise dull existence. I eventually buckled under the weight of a serious depression which caused me to withdraw from the world and seek comfort in drugs and a darkened room. I lay alone and permanently wasted in the squaller of my den evaluating suicide as a possible option and wishing that Sylvia was around to distract me from my morbid and defeatist thoughts. The thing that eventually snapped me out of my self pitying doldrums was an unexpected eviction order from our roof garden by the owner of the pub. They wanted to renovate the place and use it for private functions, so Pedro and I were promptly kicked out and given less than a week to move. My melancholy disposition was replaced by the sudden rush you get when you know you have reached the end of a chapter and it's time to move on to new horizons. It was time for some fast decisions about whether I should stay in my big city rut or head for greener pastures in search of a new life. The latter quickly got my vote, at which I was hit by a stirring new enthusiasm to hit the road. It's amazing how we can take the roof over our heads for granted and how important it suddenly becomes when your shelter is taken away. I needed a permanent dwelling where I wasn't subject to the dictates of others and the most logical option was my old Ford Transit that was sitting in storage over at the Black Wattle theatre. My trusty old workhorse had not been moved in the months following the collapse of the band, but with a charge to the battery and a few minor adjustments the motor fired up after the third turn of the ignition. I parked the Transit out the front of the theatre on Glebe Point Road and placed the XP in the spot where it had been. All of my home recording gear and other possessions were stacked on the front and rear seats till they touched the roof then I threw a large tarpaulin over the whole thing. With nothing in the van other than a mattress, a gas cooker and a few music cassettes I commenced my new life a motorised nomad. Drifting like a windswept leaf from one camping spot to another around the northern beaches of Sydney and wondering why the hell I hadn't started doing it sooner. From the Spit Junction to Palm Beach I camped by the ocean and pursued a life that was so much simpler than the one I had escaped. The role of a wandering beach bum suited me down to the sand as I woke up each morning to spectacular ocean views and cleared my head of the madness I had been living. The artist within me re-emerged with time and I could be seen sketching or writing on beachfronts and in public recreation areas. People would often come over to admire my work if I was drawing and it always came as a pleasant surprise when they shared compliments or praise. Each time it happened I was forced to wrestle with the notion that all an artist really needs to be successful is the appreciation of another human being.

~~ART FOR ART SAKE~~

~~MONEY FOR GOD SAKE~~

After a few weeks of living in the van I learned to predict the night and morning patrols of the Council Rangers in whatever location I had stopped and I planned my movements around them. As a rule I would arrive at an intended camping site at around dusk and I would be gone with the sunrise before the Rangers did their morning rounds. I had started getting into spear fishing again in a big way and other than my artistic pursuits it was the main focus of my days activity. It felt like I was turning into some kind of urban, feral, hunter and gatherer but that was ok because I've always been a gypsy at heart. One crisp morning in June as I camped beside the Pittwater inlet I woke up to frost on the inside of the windows and droplets of semi frozen condensation dripping down onto my pillow. It triggered a moment of extreme exasperation in me and it was in the very next moment that I decided to leave Old Sydney Town and drive North to spend my days under the tropical sun. As I sipped on a hot coffee and dried my bedding by the campfire I sorted through an old box of roadmaps that was sitting under the front seat of the van. Opened on my lap was a map of the Northern Rivers and a red circle was purposefully marked around the township of Nimbin. Another was assigned to the coastal village of Byron Bay and I swear that I actually started feeling warmer with each new circle I drew. Within a couple of hours of my decision to leave Sydney I was on the road clocking up the miles and watching the metropolitan landscape shrink to a hazy, distant blur in the rear vision mirror. I grooved to the heavenly sounds of Santana as I motored along, only ever stopping briefly to roll a joint or take a piss, then it was back to the rushing white lines of the highway. On the outskirts of Newcastle while parked near a roadhouse I was deeply engrossed in a filter that I was trying to get into a spliff I had just rolled. Jimi Hendrix asking 'Are You Experienced' was blaring out of the stage monitor I had mounted in the back and it scared the living shit out of me when two young faces appeared in the passenger side window. The pair introduced themselves as Donna and Paul and they wanted to know if they could catch a ride to Coffs Harbour. I told them it was not a problem and after I had cleared the seat of my rubbish they jumped in beside me. The kids said they had been hitching at the roadhouse for hours and they were very thankful that I was giving them a ride. We finished smoking the joint and then Paul pulled out his stash and rolled a monster scoob of stinky buds. From the bag he extracted a quite sizable cluster of glistening, bright green heads and put them into my tobacco pouch on the dash. I thanked him in all sincerity because my stash was heading ever closer to the point of critically low and I had no idea where I was going to score in my travels. Near the township of Nambucca Heads we spotted another hitchhiker, sitting by the side of the road and we all commented on what a bad location he was in for catching a ride. I did an illegal turn near a road bridge and we doubled back to where he was with the Jim Morrison belting out Roadhouse Blues at almost full volume through the speakers. The guy came running over to where we had stopped and he was very happy to have landed a ride.

Donna and Paul scrambled into the rear with their backpacks and our new travelling companion jumped in the front with me. He said that his name was Bill and he instantly offered me money for fuel. I said that it would certainly help as I was travelling on a very limited budget, so when next we stopped he filled the bloody tank. Nice people. Bill said that he had to get to Mullumbimby by the morning and that fitted in perfectly with my plans. At around sunset we dropped Paul and Donna off just outside of Coffs Harbour at the bus depot and after they had unloaded their backpacks from the van we bid them fond farewells. Bill and I hit the road again bound for The 'Land of the Rainbows', and to enhance the mood a little I put my favourite Hawkwind tape in the player. The windows started to rattle from the deep, bass oriented drones and Bill was quick to mention that it was ... "Good Acid Music man". Our conversation had been largely centred around drugs from the word go so it didn't surprise me at all when he produced a gram packet of speed and offered me some. The speed kicked in quickly announcing it's arrival as quality produce and we buzzed along through the night to the sounds of Hawkwind followed by Tangerine Dream and then Pink Floyd. The dawn lit peak of Mount Chincogan came into view through a shifting mist as we drove onto the dirt road that led to Bills home. Once at the end of a long, lantana infested bush track I brought the van to a stop beside an ancient farmhouse that looked like something out of a horror movie. Bill said "Welcome to the Dropout lodge" and we were greeted by a number of people who came running out the front door. The old vine covered cottage and the six-acre property surrounding it was home to about twenty assorted musicians, artists and children I was informed over hot coffee and toast. Bill and his friends said that I was more than welcome to stay as long as I want and after breakfast I was showed a spot near some tall bamboo where I could park the van and set up camp. Bill and I were too amped up on the speed to even think about sleeping so when a mid morning jam session erupted around the kitchen we were in there boots and all, yodelling and howling to fast moving folk ditties and jigs. Our wonderful arrival at the Dropout Lodge began a lasting friendship with Bill as my official tour guide for the Northern Rivers. I was the one with the car and he was the one who knew where all the best fun could be had, so it was a balanced situation we exploited for all it was worth. I had been living on the property for a couple of months when it was announced that everybody was heading off to a Harvest Ball at a place called the Tumble Community. When we arrived our convoy was parked in a large clearing with a host of other brightly painted hippy mobiles and around them tents and tipis were erected. It was my first ever, true festival experience and as I cruised around checking everything out, the life I had abandoned seemed a million lifetimes away.

Most of the Dropout Lodge crew were scheduled to perform at the Harvest ball in the evening and I was invited to join them on the stage. This I happily did with great gusto and it sure felt great to be singing for a partying crowd again. When the festivities had subsided and coffee was brewing the next day word began circulating that a large group of people were going to a protest action in the nightcap forest near Nimbin. Bill and the others were going so naturally I tagged along. I was assured by the crew that a full scale protest blockade would be the perfect thing to top off my first ever festival experience.

In historical terms the Nightcap Forest campaign is acknowledged as the very first environmental protest actions in this country. I was fortunate enough to be there and it was eye opener beyond compare. The activists were spared no mercy by an army of hard nosed police and at every opportunity the loggers inflicted as much harm as they could on the protestors. I was witness to countless situations where chained and padlocked activists were brutally man handled as they cut away the chains and on more than one occasion the victims were just young children. I had run to the aid of one such brave young individual when I felt the whack of a police baton at the back of my head. I was dragged through the dirt on my face and when I came to I was in the back of a police truck with people I recognised from the Harvest ball. Everyone who was arrested received fines and some even harsher penalties for their role in the protest and the Judge at the Lismore courthouse said "The world would be a better place without interference from unkempt ratbags" such as we. Many of the activists went straight from the courthouse back into the forest, but the dropout lodge crew decided to call it a day as it wasn't a safe place for the children. I stayed on the property in Mullumbimby for a couple of more months after the blockade, but I had been told about a groovy alternative community in Nimbin called the 'Stardust Dreaming Camp' and I wanted to check it out. There were about thirty permanent residents scattered around the nine acre hinterland spread in tents, tipis, caravans and a variety of other alternative dwellings such as domes and yurts.



The bloke who owned the Dreaming camp was a retired Sydney businessman who had supposedly turned his back on the trappings of wealth and power to pursue a more spiritual calling. His correct name has to remain unpublished due to a request for privacy, so for the sake of the story I have given him the title of 'Mr Metaphysicus'. When first I joined the community and was introduced to our host he was sitting in a lotus position on top of a large water tank at the rear of his stately country homestead. It was raining quite steadily but this detail was ignored as I was treated to a quite convincing sermon about the rewards of "surrendering our sense of personal identity to the never ending stream of consciousness". The self appointed guru of the Dreaming camp was a thick set guy with a hard face who looked better suited to the role of a Vietnam veteran or a rugby league player than any kind of wise and gentle mystic. From first light in the morning until the sun had escaped the sky Mr. Metaphysicus chain smoked joints and espoused a mish mash of different philosophies to anyone who would listen. He had an almost intimidating intensity about him and often I felt the sky might cave in if should I avert my focus from his piercing green eyes. Mr. Metaphysicus loved the idea of living a simplistic lifestyle based on the pursuit of heavenly wisdom, but it seemed he was wasn't completely capable of turning his back on the ways of the world.

Not long after my arrival a section of the property was opened up as a tipi village which was designed to attract the hoards of young backpackers who came into the Nimbin area. Each tipi was hired out for the sum of thirty dollars per night to the young travellers and our host was often seen counting wads of cash at the living room table. He used to laugh it off by saying, ... 'Mere running costs' but that failed to dim the illumination of pulsing dollar signs that were glowing in his eyes. The man was a living contradiction of all he promoted in his unending dialogue with the world and I think that was the thing I most liked about him. Early in the game Mr. Metaphysicus and I established that we were both prone to a good belly laugh at the world through which we travel. The man was quite a songster so much of our in depth, truth seeking conversation was punctuated by merriment when either one of us, or both broke into song. The large living room and kitchen area of the house was graced by an enormous camphor laurel, stained table which seated about fifteen people. It served as the main meeting area for the clan and was often the setting for big community cookups. At any hour of the day or night a colourful assortment of individuals could be found choofing away on the latest offering of Dreaming camp weed and engaging in the most mind boggling raves you could ever possibly imagine.

After moving to the Dreaming camp I kicked around Nimbin for a year or so but the ever present smack vibe started to dissipate the magic. I was glad for the time I had on the Northern rivers living with the freaks and misfits but I knew that it was time to move on. My initiation into the ways of the counter-culture couldn't have happened in a better location than Nimbin. It's an art and consciousness inspired little hamlet that sits right in the middle of the conservative, rural heartland. A cosmically charged microcosm of the alternative lifestyle movement, that can make you feel like you are at a chooffed out love festival the whole year round. I lived among the hippies and other North coast fun junkies for about three years after leaving Sydney but as they say, "All good things must come to an end". I was spurred to move on one day as I was doing repairs to the van and digging around under the front seat in search of a misplaced wrench. I came across my old map of Australia and reflected on a circle I had drawn around Cairns at the start of my tropical escapade. A sudden reawakening of my travel bug occurred in the days that followed which motivated me to broker a deal involving fifteen pounds of the local weed. At the successful completion of this exercise I had enough cash in hand to get the van professionally serviced and a substantial travel budget was stashed deep inside the dashboard. My decision to get out of the Northern Rivers was inspired as much by a momentary impulse as it was by the fact my pot growing experimentations had been happening directly under the flight path of the drug squad. Around the dreaming camp it was not unusual to be woken first thing in the morning by a police helicopter hovering low over the property and scanning the terrain.

The vastness of the North Queensland rainforests seemed like a far more viable location to nurture a crop as there is just so much fantastic, unbroken wilderness the chopper pilots have to cover. A group of backpackers who had been staying in the tipi circle found out that I was planning to travel to North Queensland and they ask if I would be interested in taking the five of them along. I agreed on the understanding we would share the cost of fuel and maintenance for the van to which they were more than happy. A going away party was organized by Mr. Metaphysicus on the evening before we were scheduled to leave and it took place under a spectacular full moon that lit up the valley. We jammed and partied until late in the night then in the morning with very little sleep we said goodbye to the dreaming camp crew and set off for Cairns.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



I SAID, . . . "DANCE HIPPY!"

Far North Queensland is a conveniently remote location that is pretty much the end of the road for many a desperado who is on the run from the southern states. Once in residence at the top end it's easy to blend in with the mostly wild and untamed landscape as you lay low from detection by the law in some shady hideaway under the tropical sun. I wasn't on the run from the authorities but I was most definitely running away from myself and all I stood for. All of the local deadbeats and no hopers were those I most easily clicked with in my travels around the cape as I ventured from one volatile jungle fringed location to another. Most places I went in my travels sufficed for a short stay at most and all would surely never become my home. The term '*Going troppo*' is the one that best describes the state of being I adopted in my time as a free floating coconut on the unchartered seas of despair and oblivion. Through sheer force of will I eventually snapped myself out of the time wasting cycle I was drowning in and I dragged myself away from the mosquito infested inertia of the tropics. I escaped on an impulse to the call of the urban sprawl and after a long drive from Cairns back to Sydney I became re immersed in the industrial beat of the inner city.



'HANGING ON THE CROSS'

A van full of eager, young holiday makers helping to cover the on road expenses was a big plus as it allowed me to get to Far North Queensland with cash to spare on my arrival. There were a few minor mechanical difficulties along the way but nothing I couldn't handle. After a new oil filter here and a radiator plug there it was back to the open road and whatever lay ahead. We all agreed early in the game that there was no rush to get to Cairns, so it was like I was a tour coach driver on a free and easy tropical escapade. On our arrival at the Cairns backpacker hostel I bid my passengers farewell and headed for the nearest bar to wet my whistle. The Oceanic hotel down by the waterfront was where I eventually settled and it was to become my regular haunt for the time I was in the area. The quaint little mountainside township of Kuranda was to become my preferred home base as I explored the region and became immersed in the wonders of the tropics.

My first campsite was situated at the end of a hillside track beside a deep, freshwater swimming hole. The large, rocky pool sat at the base of a high, cascading waterfall and it was the perfect setting to contemplate the path my journey had taken. I sketched the surrounding terrain and breathed in the fresh mountain air grateful to be alive and far from the madding crowd. I was content just hanging around at my campsite for days on end and it didn't really bother me if I never saw another living soul. From time to time the odd four wheel drive could be heard off in the distance, grinding it's way through the overgrown, hairpin bends that led down to my camp. The sounds of straining engines always gave me plenty of time to throw on a sarong just in case the vehicle located my dead end, bush track campsite and needed to do a u-turn. It was often the case that I would not have seen or spoken to anyone for more than a week and then I would be suddenly confronted by a carload of 'big city off roaders' who had strayed too far off the markings on their maps and ended up in my beautiful back yard. Whenever I was in Cairns to pick up supplies and the like the Oceanic hotel was always my first port of call. It was here at one of the lunchtime, lingerie spectaculars they used to have that I first met up with Leo Scudds.

He was a big city party animal in exile much the same as myself and he shared the dream of pulling off a million dollar crop somewhere out in the jungle. I found that I was journeying into Cairns more often than usual just so I could hang out with Leo and it got to the point where I was camping in the back lane behind his low rental rooming house, just off the main street. Every day without fail Leo and I would sit around in the beer garden blowing our welfare payments on Four X beer and Frigate rum and when we ran out of cash we just sold some more pot to the tourists. Leo had been on the lookout for potential crop locations long before I arrived in town but he was restricted from getting a patch started because he didn't own a car. When I came along he was quick to propose a partnership which he claimed would land us both on easy street and get us all the high class chicks we wanted. Leo started yapping in my ear about a sheltered clearing he had found in the rainforest near Mount Douglas, that was so remote and inaccessible the police choppers would never be able to see it from the air. He said if I wanted to share in the profits from the crop then all I had to do was transport him and his newly sprouted seedlings to the site and check in from time to time with supplies until the plants were mature. We shook hands on the deal and the next morning I loaded the van from the floor to the roof with seedling pots, camping gear and provisions. After only five days in the jungle Leo found that he couldn't handle the isolation and the silence of paradise. He hiked out of the scrub and made his way back to Cairns, but he left his camp set up where it stood in clear view of the newly established plots. I was eventually persuaded to drive him back into the forest to retrieve his belongings and that was my big mistake.

As we made our way along the thin dirt track to his camp a police Landrover came speeding up from behind and signalled for us to stop. My partner in crime had left some personal papers in his tent and the first thing the copper said was, "*Which one of you is Leonardo Peter Scudds?*" Apparently some tin miners in the area had noticed that Leo's camp was abandoned and informed the local police that they thought he might have got lost. What an absolute dumbfuck. I got off with a three hundred dollar fine and it made me seriously reconsider devoting all of my time to being a primary producer of pot. One day in the beer garden of the Oceanic I met a couple of cute and well to do Sydney girls called Sally and Jean who were holidaying in the tropical sun. Leo and I became their official tour guides and they spoiled us rotten for about six weeks. The girls insisted on doing all of the normal touristy things like scuba diving and the like but all we wanted to do was get into their flimsy little sarongs.

My old Maori buddies the Colour Machine flew into Cairns to play the local disco's and we raged just like in the old days at their gigs and around the motel pool. Our fun loving foursome went to most of the bands shows and I got to do a couple of impromptu guest spots which really impressed Sally and Jean. As their northern holiday drew to a close the girls decided that they would hire a car and stretch out their tropical adventure. Sally and I had become smoochy and explorative to the point of spoof stained shorts so I offered to drive them down South if they helped me out with the fuel.

I tried to persuade Leo to come down to Sydney with us but he had to make a court appearance in a couple of weeks time and failure to do so would end him up in the clink. We hugged and said goodbye to each other grateful for our time together. His parting statement was 'You lucky bastard' as I drove off towards the motel to pick up the girls. It was fantastic to be on the road again especially since I was in the company of two gorgeous babes, who were helping to foot the bills. After numerous touristy stopovers at places like Townsville and Bundaberg our free wheeling trio stopped in the northern rivers and we stayed in Nimbin for a couple of days. It was a real blast to catch up with the old Dreaming camp crew and get into some grass roots culture and tribal music. In the time since I had been there last Mr. Metaphysicus had further extended conversions of the property into a world class backpackers resort.

A newer and much larger tipi circle had been established high on the flood free slopes, complete with a shower block and a fully equipped community kitchen. Our guru turned resort proprietor said we could use one of his forty five dollar a night tipis for as long as we wanted to stay and he wouldn't hear of taking any money from the girls. I told him that we didn't mind paying the fee like everyone else, because we were "Not Attached" to the cost of our accommodation. At this my once in a blue moon spiritual adviser made a gesture reminiscent of a small boy squirming with absolute delight. For the duration of our stay the girls were treated to tribal displays of all descriptions as we partied by firelight and danced underneath the stars.

They joined in the conga line and grooved to the pulsing primal beat while naked and brightly painted fire throwers lit up the tipi dotted hills. It was a long way from anything my companions were familiar with and they drank in the wild atmosphere like all other big city escapees who have been welcomed into tribal life. Sally got all ochred up with the resident females and did a provocative fireside dance dressed in nothing but a gum leaf skirt. Her dark hair was crowned in a ring of native flowers and she threw tiny petals at me from behind the flickering flames. This ritual is a contemporary woman's dance and it's main purpose is to single out the menfolk who are seated on the ground. As the romantic mood of the evening unfolded both Jean and Sally threw petals in my direction which got the old 'Ju Ju' juices flowing and triggered sexual imaginings far too rude to even divulge.

After the party in Nimbin everyone crashed out dead tired as the first blue, tinged hint of dawn began to illuminate the ridges around the valley. Sally fell asleep in my arms by the fire with Jean resting her head on my leg. 'Mr. Happy' rose to the occasion by trying to muscle his way out of my tight fitting shorts but I eventually nodded off as the kookaburras were starting to announce the new day. At about midday we were woken by the smell of boiling, spicey chai tea. The girls decided that they didn't want to go to Sydney just yet, so we drove over to Surfers Paradise to check out the action at Jupiters Casino. At no expense to myself I was suddenly an overnight resident at the Ramada Hotel and my companions giggled like naughty geisha girls as they informed me it was time to spoil ourselves after our time in the great outdoors. By the time we had finished unpacking our bags there were gum leaves all over the luxury apartment from the skirts the girls had been wearing at the moondance. I made note that the apartment would make an ideal romantic setting where Sally and I might further explore our inner, carnal desires. Our summer holiday fling had not as yet been consummated because the poor girl was trying to work out if she was 'bi' or 'hetro' and I was just her latest little 'hands on' experimentation. After the girls had lost a heap of cash at the Jupiter's Casino they just laughed it off and we went on a bar hopping pub crawl through a multitude of disco's and other smoky haunts. Our mission to get as many kicks as the night would allow was punctuated by lemon soaked slugs of tequila and expensive cuban cigars. Dressed in evening garments that more closely resembled frilly underwear my disco dancing companions were acting very sexy for any male eyes that happened to be looking in. Sally and I were pretty well booked in as a sure thing but Jean appeared to sending the 'come and get it' vibe my way as well. It didn't seem to bother Sal at all when her girlfriend sidled up to me and every time she did it reignited thoughts of a three way romp in the hay. They were like those highly charged floosies you see on late night dancefloors who try to out sex each other for the boys. A couple of punters tried to move in on Jean but she just brushed them away like bothersome flakes of lint. I scored some hash from a guy at the bar which intensified the festivities and really got the girls bopping. When we found out there was also some ecstasy available three of the little pink pills were included in our stash of party aids. None of the girls had tried the drug before so we decided to wait until we got back to the Ramada to drop them.

When we got back to the hotel late in the night and as drunk as marauding pirates, the girls danced on the outside balcony to the most romantic of my cassettes. They swooned and swayed like palms in a tropical storm as the mood was set to the tone of Silk Degrees by Boz Scaggs. Within half an hour we were falling all over each other laughing and dancing as the ecstasy did it's job and the layed back, chummy music was replaced by some solid driving Rock and Roll. The affections of Sally and I spilled into the dancing circle and before I knew it I was stretched out on a big leather couch with an irresistible go go girl on either side. *'Oh! heavens preserve us! ... Could it be that I am the lucky representative of my gender who these delectable pussycats have schemed and conspired to seduce. Yes!, ... Ouch!, ... Oh!, ... boy!'* Unwanted clothes were hastily discarded as a stereophonic flood of sensations caressed my sweetly surrendered form.

In the candlelit haze of a Gold Coast dawn I was initiated into a Bacchanalian ritual which rendered every other sexual encounter obsolete. You know it's true what they say about men who scoff at the idea of two women in bed at the same time. They're all just dirty lying bastards. Our drunken threebee was just a one off event which was laughed away over breakfast by all of us. When we arrived in Sydney the girls resumed their normal lives and we hardly saw each other again. As I reminisce on our naughty little holiday orgy I like to think of it as the pinnacle of my sexual growth and achievement. My standards were raised so high by the event, that these days only the very best of thoroughbreds are allowed to reside in my stable of erotic dreams.



AND THEY KEPT SAYING I SHOULD HAVE BEEN A MOVIE STAR

Having been lost for so long in the easygoing backwaters of the tropics the high speed contrast of Sydney was exhilarating. To feel a little more like I belonged in the world I had re-entered I discarded my threadbare, beach bum attire and started building a wardrobe more in tune with the local scene. My head was completely shaved to celebrate the new, big city look and it complimented the over all effect which displayed a 'don't fuck with me' kind of streetwise appearance. Winter was just around the corner and it seemed like a good time to put my motorised nomad routine on hold for a while.

I sold the van to a mate for a thousand bucks and took a horrible little room in the Annandale hotel out on Parramatta Road. It was the second most depressing address I have inhabited beside that horrible little single mans quarters back in Adelaide. The reason I took the room at the pub was because my mate the ever enterprising Quick Bucks had established a fully equipped rehearsal studio just up the street. The place throbbed twenty four hours a day as bands came and went and it became the central hub of my world as I reconnected with the Sydney scene. The Futura came out of storage at the rear of the Black Wattle and I was relieved to find that none of my belongings had been pilfered by thieves.

My vintage saloon was left sitting there for ages taking up much needed space, but all my friends would take for their troubles was a bottle of champagne and a fifty dollar bag of pot. I shared tales of my adventures with the artists at a lavish dinner party which was held in one of the larger studio spaces. There was music and poetry by firelight in an outside courtyard and I sang to sweet folk music as good as any I had enjoyed with the Dropout Lodge crew. The talent I was being exposed to at the Black Wattle gathering told me that I was in the right place to start recruiting musicians. The years that I had been away from the entertainment racket had made me more realistic in my outlook and I had little interest in pursuing success as a stage performer. I was however keen to get started on a recording project so as to capture the songs I had written while I was on the road. Quick Bucks allowed me to use a little back room which was the storage area for mike stands, cables and a whole bunch of other stuff. It was only really big enough for the fourtrack and myself but within days I had a system worked out where I could recruit players from the multitude of traversing musicians. Between practice sessions I used to get them to stand in the hallway and play guitar or keyboard tracks over the drum machine while I rolled joints and topped them up with beer. After long hours at the fourtrack recording music beds my favourite way of relaxing was to drive into the cross and see what was happening in the clubs. One night in the penthouse disco at the Rex hotel I met a Hungarian strip club owner called Frankie Alistair and we got tanked up on vodka with a group of strippers who were chilling between shows.

It was a real test of my masculine perceptions to work out which ones were the actual females and I'm sure I had a bloke sitting on my lap at one stage in the game. Frankie loved me to pieces when he found out that my old man had escaped from Hungary during the uprising. He told me a story about how he had narrowly missed death in a firing squad by playing dead. Apparently there's a bullet hole in each of his ears but you couldn't see them for a thick mass of slicked back hair. Frankie wasn't the sort of guy that you would ask to pull back his hair so you could see if he was telling the truth or not. Frankie and I became regular drinking mates and after a while he offered me a job as a spruiker at the Pink Pussycat. I jumped at the offer so I could check out the rest of the girls and perhaps improve on my limited street cred.

The cash that I received for my long hours on the door was hardly worth the effort but I had landed in one of the best pot dealing locations the cross has to offer. The front entrance to the Pussycat was the spot where the original Kings Cross bikers used to park their rigs. BJ, Frank and the rest of the boys were on Frankie's payroll if ever there was trouble and I used to give lip to whole football teams knowing that I was protected. As long as I sang whisky drinking, blues favourites for those guys I got away with murder. I came to know the strippers and the club staff quite well and in time the burlesque crowd became my greatest source of fun.

There's nothing better when you are off your trolley and raging than to be surrounded by a room full of red light district funsters who are letting off steam. The stern and unapproachable masks that are worn to keep the public at bay are cast aside in a firestorm of hardcore behind the scenes theatrics. It was at one of these exclusive little gatherings that I witnessed the most Fellini'esque apparition of my life. A chubby little foot cop walked in at closing time and plonked himself down on a Drag Queens lap in the change room. They gave each other a long and truly passionate tongue kiss, then he continued to slurp on a Fosters beer that came out of Frankie's well stocked bar fridge.

After the merriment of the evening I would normally drive back to Annandale half pissed as the sun was rising and I knew that it wouldn't take long before I got pulled over. To avoid getting busted for drink driving I moved out of the pub and took a room in the Plaza hotel overlooking the main drag in the cross. My days were mostly spent hanging out at the rehearsal studios and my night shift went from the Pussycat, to the clubs and then to a comfortable woman's bed if my night hawking charms were true to form. After less than a month I found that the Plaza had become unbearable to live in due to the noise of the hookers and their endless stream of rowdy men. One of my pot customers told me about a big mansion that had recently been vacated in Potts Point so after our transaction was complete I strolled over to check it out. The building was known as Tusculum House and it was a grand old colonial structure with high pillared verandas both upstairs and down.

The place got it's name from the large marble tiles on the verandas which were mined and transported from a town of the same name in Italy. I was later to find out that it was the home of the first bishop of Sydney a certain Monseigneur Fulton. Jamie Mac and I walked into the abandoned building through tall cedar front doors which were left swinging in the breeze. The place had been occupied only days before by some Catholic nuns who provided meals for the drunks and the streetkids. It seemed strange that printed religious literature had been left piled and scattered all over the estate and even the plaster statues of Mary and Jesus were left standing in the chapel downstairs. Jamie and I moved into the empty church building that very afternoon and started to clean the place up. A virtual army of streetkids, buskers and assorted Kings Cross locals were persuaded to help us to get the job done with the promise of a room as their reward. The mansion had about thirty spacious teak trimmed compartments with a large central ballroom on both the upstairs and downstairs levels. Within two days all of the rooms were taken except for two that were set up as kitchens. Even though our new squat was filled to capacity the street people just kept drifting in. Before long there were teenage runaways and single mothers, drunks, junkies and jive talking jesters in every nook and cranny of the house. We expected the cops to arrive any day after we got the place established, but instead more than two weeks after moving in we were visited by a couple of fast talking Lebanese businessmen.

They were escorted to the front gate by our squad of resident martial arts enthusiasts and threats of further action were heard as they drove off in imported luxury cars. Bottom of the Harbour scandals were making news in all of the papers and I found out along the street telegraph that our palatial new home was somehow involved. The cops eventually turned up looking for some streetkid or other, but no mention was made of the fact we were squatting. They just left us to ourselves and went on their merry way with the usual kind of parting advice, *"Don't you fuckheads wreck the place it's not yours."* As best I could imagine our Lebanese gangster friends were in the lockup and the cops probably liked the idea of having all of the street people assembled in one place. They popped in from time to time looking for runaways and other escapees, so we were forced to adopt a strict house policy to show all known fugitives the door. The kitchens and bathrooms operated pretty smoothly most of the time, but there were the inevitable clashes which saw our martial arts peacekeepers stepping in to settle disputes. Our raggle taggle gang of street people attracted some exceptionally wild spirits who had lost the plot and were lashing out at the world. One such case was Kit Kat a young street kid from the northern suburbs who was the daughter of a devout Christian preacher. On the first day after her arrival Kit Kat flipped out in the downstairs chapel and smashed up all of the statues. Praise Satan was scribbled on the sky blue walls in menstrual blood and she was splashing the room with methylated spirits when one of the older squatters stepped in. Before she could burn our new home to the ground the poor girl was carted off to a lunatic asylum and pumped so full of drugs that she couldn't even remember her name.

Fun in Hell

*Prophets come and profits go
they hang them on crosses and gun them down
they wait till the artist is dead and gone
then they sell all his work when he's not around.
His decuples wailed and gnashed their teeth
claiming we have been chosen to preserve this tale
The whole world must know of this brilliant man
then the paraphernalia went on sale.*

*And still to this day they worship their idol
to the poor congregation ... his story they sell
and they wait for the hour of judgement to come
and they all agree ... it's fun in Hell.*

*And it came to pass it became a religion
then in no time at all it became confused
the original words became so out of date
and words out of context are always misused.
So misused in fact that the last edition
that by those of the faith was not understood
now the scriptures are gathering dust on the shelf
and their Saviour didn't come like he said he would.*

*And still to this day they worship their idol
to the poor congregation ... his story they sell
and they wait for the hour of judgement to come
and they all agree ... it's fun in Hell.*

*The rich men bought their way into Heaven
gold Rolls Royces and ivory towers
while the workers at the end of the unemployment line
complain they've been waiting for hours ... and hours.
Poor confused parents cause children to stumble
and they never locate the kingdom within
while the star of the show shouts down from the pulpit
You were born to suffer ... you were born to sin.*

*And still to this day they worship their idol
to the poor congregation ... his story they sell
and they wait for the hour of judgement to come
and they all agree ... it's fun in Hell.*



SOME OF THE HOUSE OF PEACE CREW

As time went by most of the 'Fuck the world' devotees were replaced by a more creative breed of inhabitants. Eventually every second room was occupied by an artist or musician and petty domestic conflicts no longer filled our graffiti decorated halls. I was living among a virtual treasure chest of musical talent and just a short walk up the street we could all draw a substantial income from busking. I set up my recording gear in the chapel after the shattered fragments of Jesus and his cohorts were swept away. I found the resident buskers were easy to enlist in my music project with a smoke and a couple of beers. Most of them were new to any kind of recording, but in spite of that they gave my four track demos the folky, earth bound flavour that was needed to best convey the issue related songs. One of the main players I worked with was an Aboriginal fellow by the name of Cubby. He used to get a big kick out of the recording thing and our late night jam sessions were enhanced by the sound of banging sticks and didgeridoos. Cubby's mates from Redfern were regular visitors to the squat and through them I was given a rare glimpse into the ghetto life of inner city, indigenous people. One night at the peak of the Redfern riots I was invited by Cubby and his friends to check out the Coorie radio station which was right in the midst of violent police clashes.

streetwise

Those who go below the surface do so at their peril
a rude awakening waits for those who choose to look behind the curtain
certain things are better off left a mystery
Ignorance is bliss if you don't know what you're missing
you can't resist the kiss of death so your curiosity leads you
like a lamb to the slaughter like god's only begotten daughter
hangin around the cross, Toffee apple and fairy floss
standing in the devil's doorway looking through your pocket for the key
Psychotropic hallucinations in a neon lit grave yard
dead and half dead corpses raise their glasses to the sky
you can get anything you want from an underhanded skeleton claw
yours of course, a toothless apparition
it's your guide, open wide, make the big transition
into the light, wake in fright, you thought that you were sleeping
then into your dreams, these words came creeping
saying, snap out of it, get it together, don't blow your chance
it's now or never baby!
You don't look too streetwise to me, You don't look too streetwise to me
You didn't go to the school of hard knocks and that is plain as day to see so
You don't look too streetwise to me, Ah! ha!
You don't look too streetwise to me.

I was the only white man among the group and as we walked towards the Radio Redfern building my trusty guides had to negotiate my safe passage past a number of disgruntled black activists. When finally we arrived at the station I was introduced to the DJ who had been told in advance that I was coming. Laughing and maintaining his on air hype he physically hauled me into the broadcasting booth and introduced me to his listeners as, "Comrade Steve", ... *The Busker with a social conscience from Kings Cross*. The radio announcer praised the fact I had welcomed blackfellas and whites alike into our newly established squats and he played a track in my honour that went by the name of, ... 'Comrade Jesus'. I was completely blown away and humbled by the compliment, but what happened next was a tribal initiation of the highest order. As the Comrade Jesus song was blasting out into the Sydney night Cubby and his mates invited me to be part of a ritual they only bestowed upon a select few. My hand was painted in a splash of earth toned paint and then placed on the large studio door alongside the likes of Gary Foley, Guboo Ted Thomas, Burnham Burnham, Charlie Perkins and others. That event marked a significant turning point in my perceptions of justice and it caused me to take a much greater interest in the freedom struggles of our downtrodden black brothers and sisters.

Life in the cross can be a true test of compassion and often I found that I had to shed the street hardened, tough guy exterior to lend a hand to someone in need. There was a short lane that led from the backyard of the squats into the cross and it served as the main walking route for the comings and goings at the house. It became a full time job to keep the rampant smackheads at bay and the sight of an unmoving human form was not unusual as I walked towards the main street. Every second day we'd have to call in the paramedics because someone had overdosed in the ally and you can believe me when I say that the image of a desperate, narceine awakened junkie is a more accurate portrayal of the walking dead than any Hollywood thriller could ever produce. The Wayside chapel was just across the road at the end of the lane and as well as providing help for the down and outers, they conducted a Sunday night open forum which attracted the creme of Sydney's street level intelligencia. The chat fest was hosted by the Director of the chapel the reverend Ted Noffs and many of the speakers who appeared were star attractions at the weekly gatherings in the Domain. My Sunday nights became devoted to mind expanding pursuits among the milk crate speakers and I got to swap ideas with a potent assembly of open minded souls. Two of the most engaging characters among them were Gary Courtney a self proclaimed, ... 'No wing radical' and an old English bloke called Webster who knew everything from the laws of thermo-dynamics to the colour of mathoosla's boots. After the raves were concluded at the chapel each Sunday a group of us would gather in the downstairs ballroom of the mansion. There was one among our group called Ian who was a self proclaimed Pagan wizard.

He used to get dressed up in a long black, KKK type of gown with a pointed hat and he would often convene candle light rituals in our midst. Things like the seasonal equinox and other naturally occurring events were given over to such festivities and it was not unusual for our bean bag reclining gang of serious thinkers to be treated to a spectacle involving naked young ladies and blood red body paint. Flagons of red wine and exotic herbal delights were consumed as the night was given over to a friendly clash of the motormouths. Passion filled conversations about the burning issues of our time continued till dawn and we hardly ever slept. The common war cry of our inner city, brain storming elite was, 'Save the Sacred cow' which meant that no topic was exempt from the collective satire. Quick wittedness was the prime objective of all who participated and I soon learned the art of holding my own amid a gaggle of predatory hecklers. I sponged up a wealth of information about what was really going on in the world from inner city wisdom seekers and pot head dropouts with impressive university degrees. In my opinion the best one liner that ever came out of our idea smithing workshops was, 'The human species was created by water to carry it's liquid mass from one place to another.' The second most significant little truism to emerge was, 'Creation is an infinite sphere who's centre is everywhere and who's outermost perimeter is nowhere'.

MY BEANBAG MATTRESS

***In the after glow of a red light district night
stale ciggie smoke and no more wine
voices ragged from the passions of debate
soggy peanuts and a broken blind
Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young
sing Teach your children and the Woodstock theme
too much thinking and my head sill hurts
like an outstretched propolactic that has burst at the seams
pray to the Moon God in the dead of the night
and unleash your precious slander on our paralytic host
of the things I have lost in this absurd little life
I think my mind I miss the most.***

North coast travellers often stayed in the house and it served as the big city base camp for many of my activist friends. Whenever there was a rally or some other kind of protest going on in Sydney our art studios and workshop spaces were opened up to welcome the migrating clan. During one such visit I found out about the forthcoming Tanalorn Folk Festival which was soon to commence in the Hunter valley. It was being promoted as 'The Festival of Transition' and most of my Sydney based hippy friends were raving about it. The event was just about to kick off so a group of us jumped in the XP and motored off to the show. The festival as it turned out wasn't so much a new age gathering as it was an almighty rock and roll piss up for beer swilling punters and hippies alike. Mud splattered mosh pit gymnasts could be seen revelling in front of the main stage as tranquil mystics and masseurs observed from their stalls high on the crowd trampled slopes. The smell of grilled tofu and other simmering, holistic delights were mixed with the aroma of snags on the barby, hamburgers and freshly projectiled puke. The two distinct sides of our cultural spectrum were situated at close quarters but the whole thing remained peaceful and free of brawls. At one stage I was dancing arm in arm with a couple of mud brown, shirtless westies when a group of hippy chicks suddenly ripped off their upper garments and joined in the fun. I found out that a meeting of the more alternative minded festival goers was being conducted away from the main stage and it was here that I bumped into an old mate from the Nightcap forest campaign. His name was Captain Casual and he was one of the key organisers who had helped to save the trees. The captain told me that a special ten minute spot had been designated on the main stage to open the show for the Nimbin Follies and it would be a perfect platform for one of my songs. The Nimbin Follies were the most popular hippy cabaret act of the day and all I had to do was convince our scampering love tribe that I was the best man for the job. When it came time for the cast of crusading hopefuls to put forward their case it resembled a comedy performance where self proclaimed everything's became unhinged before the expectant crowd. The irate contender who made his address prior to mine was gently hushed away declaring, *"But I am The Anointed Starlord from the Sirius Nebula and I bring goodwill to all mankind"*. I walked into the tribal circle and presented the crowd with a newly penned song which I had barely completed the melody for. A swinging Negro rhythm seemed to fall into place around the easy to remember lyrics and the overall effect soon had people singing along. My slightly more advanced vocal and theatrical skills seemed to provide a welcomed relief from the embarrassment of the last act, so the flower children danced and swayed in a circle and the chorus grew as others joined in. A wall of human beings began to rotate around me in great numbers then they opened up into a revolving spiral about two hundred people strong. I ended the piece with a vocal crescendo that I was later told could be heard at the outer perimeter of the spiralling, euphoric dance. The tribal vote was registered by expressions of approval from the crowd and before it even began Captain Casual was running around urging people to, *"Vote for Steve Tripp, the Singer"*.



YEAH! ALRIGHT! YA! GOT A WITNESS MAN!

I was invited back into the circle for the judging and when my name was called out the response was overwhelming. I stood back politely and concealed a hidden smile as the other contenders were met with half hearted applause. When it was announced that I would be representing our tribe on the big stage the accolades started again and the song was resumed amid deafening cheers. I already knew the band reasonably well from the harvest balls in Nimbin so no formal introductions were necessary. I was bundled into a coaster bus and we drove through some security gates to a village of tents and caravans at the rear of the stage. The previous stage setup was being replaced after the Dyvynals had concluded their gig and I was hanging around in a nervous sweat just waiting to hear my name. It was soon to ring in my ear but it wasn't coming from anywhere near the stage. A head was poking out of a caravan nearby and it belonged to my old mate Swannie. For those who don't know John Swan he is the brother of the legendary Scottish/Australian singer Jimmy Barnes and an exponent of world class vocals in his own right. Swannie and I shared a bottle of black label Johnny Walkers as the roadies cleared the stage and he agreed to accompany me when it was time to do my thing. There was a red naval ensign hanging up in the coaster so I borrowed it to use as a cape in my spot.

The flag was complimented by a rainbow embroidered headband which was tied around my head in the revolutionary style. It was getting close to my stage call and I was walking back from the toilets when I heard the words, *"Hey! fuckwit, ... Don't you know it's sacrilege to drag the Aussie flag on the ground?"* The voice belonged to none other than Michael Chugg the concert promoter and he was bellowing in my face as if I was some kind of paid employee. I was just about to respond with a smartarse remark when the noise of an accending chopper blocked us out and we were left standing there looking in each others eyes.

Swannie was hanging out of the open sliding door pointing at his watch and screaming, "Sorry mate" as the chopper banked away and Chuggy scooted off up the stairs towards the stage shaking his head. I pulled the flag a little bit higher up my back and made a mental note about using the flag in the dust idea for a video clip. As Chuggy approached the microphone stand to make the next announcement the poor stressed out numbskull didn't realise that I was the next act and he pleaded with the crowd to give me 'A Big Tanalorn Welcome'. Most of the Dyrnals fans had drifted off and they were replaced by an army of hippies and assorted freaks. The Nimbin Follies jumped in to give me some much needed vocal backup and the tribe came to life as another large, spiralling circle was formed. I was just about to go into the third verse of the song when I spotted someone who looked very much like Joni Mitchell dancing underneath a big straw hat down in the crowd. *Fuck me sideways "I did, I did see Joni Mitchell."* She was doing a highland jig with her security guard in the front of stage sludge and happily mouthing the words to my ditty.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SPARE CHANGE



As my days passed by from one year to the next I matured somewhat in my thinking and I gradually succumbed to the notion that the pursuit of fame and notoriety as a stage performer or rock star is only one option among many. Were the truth to be known I was actually better suited to the role of a street poet and busker as it was more in line with my folkloric view of the world. Of course I was still of the mind that if some game changing break were to come my way I would jump at the chance, but the street performance experience was just so much more artistically and spiritually fulfilling and I was more than content with where my life was going. Beside all that I'm quite sure I am too much of an unrestrained hedonist and I probably wouldn't have survived if I was suddenly plunged into a top end, affluent type of lifestyle. The experience of performing to street level punters under a starry sky is more immediate and real than singing down to an audience from a brightly lit indoor stage could ever be. In all reality the concept of an adoring audience looking up at a live band performance is an individual projection of ego where one or more individuals give the crowd an opportunity to imagine themselves up there shaking their stuff. On the street it's far more tribal and equal to such a degree if a performer gets too high on his horse he can easily be torn to shreds. In the following chapter I will take you behind the scenes of my musical streetlife and you can judge for yourself if I was being a wanker or not. Cheers. Big ears.

THE BUSKING YEARS

As far back as I can remember I have been an audience craving exhibitionist. I learned how to attract the limelight from any situation very early in life and my newly emerging performance skills exploded into being at every available opportunity. As a child I was branded an incurable showoff by all who crossed my path which confirmed an inner belief that I was born to entertain. I picked up my first clues on how to work an audience at my Mothers frequent and always outrageous Tupperware parties. When her fat and happy assembly of girlfriends were playing silly games to win Tupperware prizes I used to act even sillier to win their approval.

I can't imagine there's anything more hideous when you are a kid than being witness to a room full of obese women who are rendered immobile by fits uncontrollable laughter. Especially when it's because of something that you have done. My busking antics were contrived of much the same sort of stuff that I came out with as a kid and in many ways it was just like being at a big Tupperware party. The more I did it the better I became and I was struck by the realisation that street performance was my true calling in life. My job at the pussycat was no longer a critical factor to my survival because I met all of the pot customers I needed in the normal course of my day around the cross. And besides Frankie had started complaining that the attendance figures were at an all time low in the club. Apparently the street crowds preferred to watch me go through my nightly song and dance, comedy routines than walk up the sexual staircase and have a perv at the strippers. Frankie got me roaring drunk on my last night at the club and as things turned out I ended up in the cot with one of the better looking strippers. Her name was Felice and she was a very sexy dancer but the most disappointing dud fuck I have ever shared a bed with. The loss of my spruiking position was a blessing in disguise because less than a week later I was back out on Darlinghurst road singing my heart out with the buskers from the squat. As our limited repertoire of songs grew in size and quality I found that I started pulling as much money in one night as I could in three days at the club and I was earning my daily bread by doing the thing I loved most. We did foot stomping old favourites like 'Bad to the Bone' and 'When the Levee Breaks' which turned our busking circles into full blown street parties, as rage hungry pedestrians emptied their wallets into the guitar case. The street performance thing was far less restrictive than life during the Neon Farmboy era and at the end of the day I think I was actually making more cash in hand. Working musicians that I knew used to make a point of checking the earnings in our guitar case on their way to the clubs and they would walk off shaking their heads in disbelief at seeing an abundant pile of coins and notes with the odd alcoholic beverage or joint thrown in.

The logical spot from which to serenade the passing multitudes was as close as possible to the Pussycat so that BJ and his mates could assure us a trouble free night. If ever some punter was giving me the shits he would receive the traditional ham sized hand on the shoulder and be escorted out of the busking circle. My musical companions always egged me on which got me doing more outrageous things than I ever did spruiking on the door. My favourite trick to assemble an instant audience was to lay stretched out on the pavement like a drunk with a twenty dollar note protruding from the pocket of my shirt. When some lowlife, gutter rat bent down to pilfer the money I grabbed them by the scruff of the neck and scared them into a startled and hasty retreat. When the crowd saw the bikers going into hysterics at my stunts they became relaxed enough to hang around and I would usually pick myself up to a healthy applause and the sound of tinkling coins.

More through good luck than planning I had suddenly graduated to a more respectable position within the hierarchy of the street and it made me reflect on the journey that had led me to busking. Distant memories came to mind of my earliest encounters with the minstrals and how their influence had been a key factor in determining the direction my life would go. Lee Turner and his friends were my first real contact with live music but there was another event in my life that has gained a greater meaning through the years. Shortly after I got out of hospital in Adelaide I was sitting in Rundle mall watching a very talented Busker perform for the daytime shoppers. Without warning I was thrown into a state of uncontrollable excitement and a kind of creative frenzy. As I watched him sing his ditties and solicit coins from the crowd I found that I was just as excited by the power of his performance as I was by the knowledge that I might be able to do it myself. The Buskers name was 'Abe Bazzan' and he was a truly gifted, singing clown. As part of his act he pushed a busking trolley around which supported a big golden horn from an old gramophone. There were 'Anti-uranium' and other environmentally related stickers plastered all over his trolley and banjo case and they appeared quite surreal among the otherwise theatrical setting. At every available opportunity among his repertoire of happy go lucky songs Abe used to drop environmental home truths on the audience and they were graciously accepted as part of the show. His performance and boldly symbolic brand of magic had a profound effect on my creativity and the way I viewed the world. There's no doubt he triggered my natural sense of theatre and melody, but in more subtle ways he heightened my sense of environmental responsibility. Not long after we met and became friends I started writing chirpy little songs and poems for children. From there as the years moved on I progressed to foot tapping protest songs about the environment and other important issues. Abe if you are reading this you are a true friend and I value your influence dearly. You helped me to evolve into an 'Environmental Artist'.

'THANKS FOR THE INPUT MATE'

Dennis Aubrey is another busking legend around Australia and in the late seventy's he too used to perform around Rundle Mall. I made a special point of making his acquaintance and before long he started letting me do guest spots as part of his show. This is where I had my first hands on experience as a street performer. My sense of self confidence went through the roof and the response of the audience confirmed that I had what it takes to be a Busker. My first busking partner in Sydney was a guy by the name of 'Phil Laws'. Phil was a compulsive record collector who had a whole wall shelved and filled with albums from the 60's and 70's. We used to play along to his 'Leonard Cohen' records mostly and these formed the basis of our act when first we hit the street. Our repertoire included such Cohen classics as, ... 'So long Marianne'... 'Bird on a wire' and, ... 'Please don't pass me by'.

The first time Phil and I ever tried our hands at busking was the night that Bob Hawk was elected as the Prime Minister of Australia. We made over \$200 that night from an army of partying punters. The crowd was overflowing from the pavement onto the streets and in their exuberance they were playing soccer with the round plastic covers from the street lamps. A hard nosed police sergeant actually addressed me as 'Sir' as he requested assistance to disperse the crowd.

'What a blast!, ... Now this is what I call living, ...

'I was hooked on busking'



PADDINGTON MARKETS WITH MORTY AND CRAIG.

I'M ... OFF THE STREET AND ON THE ROAD ...
BUT WHERE I'M HEADING I JUST DON'T KNOW
I'M HERE TODAY AND GONE TOMORROW ...
I'M ON THE MOVE SO DON'T YOU ...
TRY TO FOLLOW ME.

My most frequent busking partner in the time I have been a street singer was an almost likeable character who I generally refer to as, ...'Lord Muck Almighty'. His real name is Ian Mortimor or 'Morty' as most people know him and he also goes by the nickname of Spinner. Mort and I share the Leo star sign and at times in his company I have felt like he is the brother I never had. I call him Lord Muck Almighty because I recognise that slumbering, king lion brand of arrogance that pervades my own persona. Our particular brand of vocal interplay and sexual innuendo in the busking circle always got us adequately laid and no attractive female was exempt from our predatory advances. In the hay day of our busking adventures we were a couple of good looking bastards who exuded a certain movie star appeal. Mort could be compared to George Clooney in one of those rugged, unshaven war flicks and more than once I have been told that I resemble Mickey Rourke by fantasy struck females. The sex thing is best way to inspire a strong reaction from the drunk and marauding street crowds and we exploited the moment for all it was worth, as lusty hoards of punters brought the red light district to life. Street performance came to dominate my life and on most days and nights I could be found entertaining the passers by on street corners, in railway tunnels, on beach promenades and out the front of entertainment complexes.

I was always in the company of the best musicians from within the busking community and it seemed like the songs we played were exactly the ones that the audience wanted to hear. We used to hook them in with get down and dirty favourites like 'Roadhouse Blues', 'Hoochy Coochy man' and 'Born to be Wild'. Then once we had them eating out of our hands we would go into the more sensitive ballads like 'Desperado', 'Fire and Rain' and 'Only women bleed'. After the crowd had reached into their pockets to pay for the entertainment we would explode into a set of the most hard hitting and confronting protest songs we could muster. Many of those tunes were penned by myself but others we did include 'Big Yellow Taxi' by Joni Mitchell and 'Something in the Air' by Thunderclap Newman. Everything was moving so fast back then I don't think I truly comprehended the significance of what I was doing. I wasn't consciously moulding myself into the role of a spokesperson for the new age, it just happened that way because of the material we performed and the raves I used to lay on the audience between the songs. I like to think that life has guided me to the role of a street level, singer of protest songs because it is necessary in the greater scheme of things.

It was not unusual for me to drop tabs of very strong LSD prior to our busking shows to accentuate the intensity of the moment. When I was at the peak of my trip among the lights and the sparkle of the street I felt more in my element than I have at any other stage in my life. My little patch on the corner of Darlington road and Roslyn street was the favourite hangout for the hookers and other night owls who haunt that side of town. I was witness to a spectacular array of sexual liaisons, drug deals, fights, arrests and then of course there were the old winos who had to be part of the show. I soon learned that our audiences enjoyed the drunken antics of the hobos so instead of trying to deter their interjections I welcomed them into the festivities. After they had babbled their way through 'In the Summertime' or some other such popular classic I would call for a big applause for 'Larry Loudmouth and 'The Amazing performing Dero's'.

The wino's would take the accolades as a cue to return to their park bench and suck on some more plonk, so I could resume the show free of any interruptions. I had those out of control pissheads reasonably well trained and if my instructions were ever ignored BJ was always there smiling on the sidelines. When the excitement of our nightly shows in the cross had expired all I would want to do was sit down at 'Alice's' outdoor cafe and count the money we had made. The money counting ritual served as a great way of coming down after hours of belting out old favourites and sucking in the toxic plumes that billow off the street. There were always moments between the money counting thing and our departure into the clubs where the fruits of my experience took form in the first evolutions of lyric and verse. I started scribbling down my thoughts on drink coasters, table napkins and menus until I had a shoulder bag bulging full of notes with which to begin documenting my life on the street.

Catchy vocal melodies started popping into my head to support the verses and choruses I had come up with and it wasn't long before I could belt out newly completed songs free of any musical accompaniment. Often it was the case if I had arrived early to secure a good busking spot for the evening, I would have a full audience assembled and throwing money before any musicians had even arrived on the scene. The crowd were already listening intently to my poetry and bopping along to my a Capella vocals, but when the guitarists and other players suddenly joined in, it was like the sound check was over and the show had truly commenced.

As well as being something of a 'Star Busker' I was also a wise cracking motor mouth who was renowned for being the life of any party I chose to attend. Most of the nightclubs where the music industry held their functions were owned by my coke snorting mates and they used to employ me to MC everything from record launches to X rated girlie nights. A couple of the better live venues in the cross catered for the needs of the local muso's when they had finished gigging and on most evenings after our busking shows the lads and I could be found in those blissfully decadent night spots.

As I drank myself to oblivion and grooved the night away to the beat of early house music, I still had my wits about me enough to pursue musical contacts. The quickest way to meet off work muso's is to be the guy who's got the best grass in the house. This commodity was easily acquired through my North coast connections and it wasn't long before I had a reputation in the clubs as the man with the goods. To get the party started I used to situate myself in a dimly lit corner at the back of the club. The first thing I would do on entering the dealers corner was roll up some one paper joints and pass them out to the resident bimbo's and groupies. Shielded from the prying eyes of any undercover cops by a wall of sexy females I could conduct my drug merchandising in relative safety. Off duty Roadies used to come over for a free smoke with the girls and this would always set the scene for the muso's to join the fun.

'Ahl, ... the tribal joys of, ... 'Late Night, ... 'Rock and Roll'

My combined evenings profit from busking and selling grass was generally enough to keep myself and any ladies that were around in drinks all night long. And that was after I had scored the mandatory gram of coke. When I was all stocked up with party aids and throwing away handfuls of cash the challenge was suddenly removed from the all consuming task of getting laid. Centrefold quality females would literally throw themselves at me for a snort of the demons dust in the wee small hours of the morning, when most righteous folk are at home sleeping. I didn't realise that women could be such blatantly shameless sluts until I became a dealer. One particular steamy, December night I was doing a roaring trade selling hash in the Kardomha Cafe and my drug peddling frenzy was interrupted in the most pleasantly imaginable way. On my return from the toilets to the bar a fellow dealer slipped me a couple of sample ecstasy tablets from a batch of ninety thousand that had just landed on our fair shores.

He said if I liked them we could do some serious business in the clubs at which I graciously accepted the pills and popped one right there on the spot. As was often the case I became bored with hustling for the next sale and I gave in completely to the party atmosphere that prevailed. Blue Ruin were going off on the stage and I was right in among the front of house action, sucking on a Corona and dancing to their grungy, street level sound. The meatmarket vibe was building in intensity as each bass heavy number superseded the last in raw, unrestrained power. The crowd shook the wooden floorboards so ferociously in their frenzy that a badly placed speaker box came crashing off the stage. The band continued on regardless as the female lead singer from the support act jumped up on a table and displayed her black suspenders to the sex charged crowd in a mock masturbation, dance routine. The band were belting out their current radio hit of Shocking Blue's 'Venus' when a tall, buxom blonde suddenly appeared on the dancefloor. She was so spectacularly beautiful that every headbanging male on the floor gave her the twice over and puffed out his chest as if he had a chance.

The fact that she was dancing with another female was all I needed to see to make a move. I swooped in on the dance happy and very drunk blonde just as a pack of howling sexual predators were about to do the same thing. My quick movements left them all gawking as I took the girl in a tango'esque embrace and swung her clear of the love hungry sharks. It was soon established over the din of the band that the girls name was Anne Charline and she came from Belgium. This fact was not conveyed by her as she spoke the bare minimum of English and her girlfriend was not much better at speaking the lingo. The girls were more intoxicated than dancing would actually allow and the blonde was swaying like a partied out love goddess who was just about to fall into my bed. From the moment our eyes met we were transfixed in a steamy, mutual attraction and a timeless, instinctive communion seemed to link our souls. Her tall, voluptuous form complimented my lean, muscular cowboy posture and it seemed the most natural thing I could be doing was biting her on the neck as she leaned on the vibrating PA stack. The girlfriend was quickly scooped up by one of the dancefloor predators which left us to ourselves in the stage lit, flashing magic of a perfect moment. Before Blue Ruin had finished their last set I had the girls out of the club and in a cab to Paddington where they were sharing a house with some Australian people. The girlfriend who's name was Joel sat in the front seat exchanging small talk with the driver and Anne Charline snuggled up with me in the back seat.



A TRUE BEAUTY

When we got to their house the jug was put on the stove, but late night cups of coffee just didn't eventuate once our heads hit the pillow. After the briefest of explorative, sexual fingerings and caresses my busty blonde from Belgium fell sound asleep until ten o'clock the next morning. I think I conked out before my hard on had even gone down but that didn't matter because I was going to be waking up with a real life angel, who liked me for what I am and not the cocaine I had stashed inside my boot.

Over the weeks that followed Anne Charline and I were inseparable and her girlfriend went everywhere with us except for the bedroom. Shucks! The girls were only in Australia on three month working visas so we made the most of every moment in the time we could be together. They escorted me on all of my nightly rounds from our street performance escapades, to the clubs and everywhere in between. One night after we had just cleaned up from busking I treated my musical entourage to drinks at the Sebel Town House in Potts Point. The Sebel is an exclusive and very selective superstar hangout that is normally frequented by touring international celebrities. Among our group there were two very Bohemian looking guitarists with instruments hanging off of their shoulders and a flute player who was tripping off his brain on mescaline. The lads had enticed three excitable young girls to join them from out of the busking circle and there was also an American speed dealer called 'Bob'.

'FREE SPEED, ... OUCH!'

In music industry circles they say, *"You are only as good as your last gig"*. I had just completed my latest musical sermon on the miracle mile and there was not a shimmer of doubt that the world was my big fat juicy oyster. Back in those ego driven and indulgent times musical success was my main obsession and it seemed quite logical that rubbing shoulders with famous people was a step in the right direction. I was out on the town charged up on speed and natural adrenaline and I was hunting for 'Popstars'. Even if no useable contacts or information were forthcoming as I introduced myself to the music industry elite it was a great scam for acquiring free tickets to the shows. As we entered the celebrity strewn front bar of the Sebel I noticed that the legendary performer 'Sting' was supping refreshments on a relatively exposed couch. There were bodyguards either side of him sitting in dainty little chairs and eager conversationalists were sprung to pounce at the bar. It just so happened that this particular night I was wearing my black leather pants and silver tipped snakeskin boots. As I recall my chest had been sprinkled with glitter under an open cascade ruffle shirt and my eyes were lined with mascara by a drag queen earlier in the evening. I ordered drinks for my companions from the top shelf and savoured the moment as we claimed a dominant focus in the room. Once this had been established I turned from the bar to find Sting's eyes fixed intently upon my own. With a healthy dose of gusto I enquired for all to hear in my finest comical English accent, *"Hey Sting", "would you care to come out and join us for a spot of busking, old son?"* He smiled and I smiled and all of my friends smiled, along with the barman and the security guards as well. In his authentic indigenous tongue he replied, *"Not tonight my old mate, ... I've just done a big show, ... the throat you know, ... Perhaps another time"*. As this happy little exchange of pleasantries was taking place the eager conversationalists started rallying for positions.

Sting's bodyguards got up from their undersized chairs and found themselves having to deter a number of journalists, muso's and cause promoting individuals. Sting appeared to find the whole thing quite amusing as he sipped on his drink and took in the scene. At the most opportune moment I made a move and occupied one of the seats that had been vacated by a guard. The security guy spotted my lightening quick gymnastics and began to apologise for Sting's inability to converse. Sting politely announced to his minders, *"It's alright let him go, ... He's a Busker"*.

Anne Charline returned to Belgium at the end of her three month visa amid airport tears and promises to visit her homeland that I knew would never come true. Our whirlwind romantic connection was ordained by the laws of pure lust, but she was tied to her snowy homeland and I was deeply committed to life in the southern sun. Besides that my alarm bells started going off when her mother enquired in a letter about the lovers snapshot we had sent her. *"Who is this funny looking, old man with a big nose?"* As it turned out my busty Belgium bed partner had some Lebanese character tucked away in her little village who was expecting her to come back home and be his bride. I was adequately resolved in the knowledge that it was just another holiday fling so there was no room left for heartache or regret to sneak in and screw up my emotions. Within two weeks of Anne Charline's departure I had hooked up with one of the chicks from the club and my blonde goddess was assigned to the photograph collection beside my bed.

Springfield's nightclub evolved out of the old 'Manzil Room' which in my opinion was the most authentic, inner city rock venue that Sydney has ever seen. This exclusive little drinking hole was hosting a welcome party for U2 when they rolled into town and the place was crawling with industry reps and celebrities. All of the party goers thought themselves much too cool to go over and meet the guys and the room was filled with an air of nervous apprehension. The band was crammed into a semi-circular, padded booth directly behind the mixing desk. Each of the compartments that lined the wall were enclosed by a laminated drinkstand that followed an unbroken line from the entrance of the club to the front of house mixing area. The drinkstand was only about a foot wide and on busy nights the sound roadies used to use it as a walkway to get in behind the mixer. It had just recently been cleared of empty glasses so I made my move. I walked in a low crouch along the drinkstand to the table of honour and with complete confidence I sat down between Bono and the Edge. My silver tipped boots were plonked up on the table in a relaxed fashion and I made quite certain not to knock over any of their drinks. Bono gave a smile of instant approval that said *"I can see what you are up to and I'm going to let you get away with it"*. I said a friendly, *"How ya goin?"* I'm Steve Tripp to the guys in the band and they seemed relaxed enough with my presence. Responding to my abrupt arrival Bono bounced to his feet and with his hand on my outstretched boot and he peered into the huddle of bodies that lined the dimly lit bar.

Once he had spotted whoever it was he was looking for he used a beckoning hand gesture to call him over. When the guy arrived at the table Bono instructed him to order drinks for myself and the babe who had commenced to swing off my arm. Lizzy was a very sexy blend of Spanish and English decent mixed with Black Irish Gypsy. She used to get around in skin tight black leather pants, boots and skimpy tops which always had the root rats sniffing around her tail. When we were out on the town heads used to turn and it was a constant job to deter the next sex crazed male. Many of the touring stars that I met in the clubs just wanted to get into Elizabeths leather pants, but I knew this wasn't the case with Bono. He was a true gentleman and he was only expressing his appreciation of the fact I had broken the stuffy and detached vibe of the room.

Bono stood up after the drinks were acquired and went to mingle with the crowd. Before he did we had a short chat about music and stuff in a freshly cleared space at the bar. Apparently he and the band like to meet the locals whenever they arrive in a new place but he said that most music industry gigs were "too reserved" for his liking. Bono introduced me to the bands public relations man then he wandered off into the smoky Kings cross night. VIP concert tickets were offered to myself and Liz by his assistant and we didn't pay for another drink all night.

'SEE WHAT I MEAN?, ... GREAT SCAM GUYS'

After the sensory overload of the evening Beth and I left the club to see what was happening on the street. It just so happened that Lord Muck was revving up a crowd in our regular busking spot, so I forgot about how tired I was and joined in the revelry. We dived into our standard repertoire of foot stomping tunes and soul stirring ballads and the audience proved more boisterous than the normal Saturday night crowd. They got into it from the word go and as we were filling the night with song and good cheer one of the local drunks came staggering through the audience right into the middle of the circle. He was breathing VO Invalid port into my face and taking swigs from the bottle as he tried to sing along. I was in the middle of 'The year 25 25' and he was seriously detracting from the majesty of the song. Trying to make it look like part of the act I pushed his face away ever so gently in what I thought would be seen as a comical gesture. At this slight interruption to his paralytic momentum the old drunk lost his balance, span in a circle and hit the pavement. I stopped singing mid chorus and bent down to help the old guy up. Suddenly a voice came thundering out from behind those at the front of the circle, "If you want to pick on someone bro, ... why don't you pick on me?" The voice belonged to a big, ugly and very pissed Samoan and he was moving through the crowd to get me. Shit! The one night of the week that BJ and the boys are off partying in the clubroom and I get landed with an eight foot gorilla who wants to kill me.

We used to busk in front of a circular concrete structure that stood about waist high and held a small tree. I started backpeddling around the plantholder as the hulk of a man came towards me. He soon found it was not going to be so easy to keep up with my evasive movements and can you believe it. The same audience who had been cheering me on just moments before tried to trip me over as I passed.

'You're a little lot aren't you?'

Seeing what was going on the staff at 'Alice's' outdoors cafe created a clever diversion by pretending to start a fight. The moment King Kongs attention was diverted away from me I made a mad dash for the restaurant kitchen. I was being escorted to safety by a young guy called Lance who used to work at the old 'Manzil'. On my way through the cooking area I grabbed the biggest carving knife I could find and followed Lance up some stairs. A door was locked behind me and I got to watch 'Godzilla' hunt for me in vain out of an upstairs window. For about two hours I could see him hanging around our street corner. Every now and again he would get up off the concrete structure and go for a wander. Eventually he just gave up and grunted his way home. It's a bloody good job I had a hip flask of Johnny Walkers and some nice weed to keep me company. I would have gone completely nuts sitting at the top of those stairs clutching the knife and imagining a violent, pre-mature death. In time I was greeted by the friendly faces of the staff. They were all laughing their heads off and saying things like, "What have you been up to now Stevie?"

Some of the drunks we encountered on the street used to fight in the travelling boxing tents that were a common part of pre-sixty's Australian culture. After the fights closed down they lost their income and celebrity status, so I guess the bottle became their only friend. Those bare knuckle boxing heroes made the sidewalk's and alleys of the cross their home and they lived the kind of true life, down and out stories that are often heard on country and western albums. One of the main trouble makers among our group of resident winos was called 'Rusty' and this street hardened old urchin once told me a story about why he had spent much of his life in jail. It was quite a heart wrenching tale and it was the main inspiration for my song 'The Bloods of Jesus'. Sometime back in the sixtee's Rusty and one of his drinking buddy's were getting pissed in a local rooming house and they ran out of booze. Rusty got up and went down to the bottl'o to get some more grog, leaving his girlfriend asleep on the lounge room floor. When he returned his drinking partner was interfering with the woman, which earned him a crack on the head with a full bottle. The angry blow killed him instantly and our mate Rusty was sentenced to an extended stay in Her Majesties prison. The most intriguing aspect of the story was the fact they buried his girlfriend in a paupers grave right in view of his cell block window. Rusty wept as he shared his story and we swigged on a bottle of green ginger plonk as the sun came up over the cross.

In the late eighties during the bicentennial celebrations the visiting navies of the world were docked in Woolloomooloo harbour. For a brief time at least the cross returned to it's former glory as a multi-cultural flotilla hit the streets in search of some rest and recreation fun. Large groups of sailor hunting females came into the city from the western suburbs and it turned into a street party grand in scale. The police were out in unusually big numbers to match the influx of revelling crowds and the mood of the place changed from one of relative tolerance to over zealous enforcement. There were cops on horses, cops with dogs and they were even perched on the rooftops armed and scrutinising the passing parade. Getting a busking spot was almost impossible as every square inch of the street was filled by the throbbing masses who were out and about on the town. It's times like this amid the sweaty, burlesque sideshow that an aura of raw sexuality seems to descend upon the streetcrowds and the busking circle is just the place to get down and dirty with guitar strumming poorboys. We've had whole groups of young women flashing their tits in the audience as we played 'Get on Top' by the late and great Tim Buckley and more than once we've had a stripper do her show right there on the pavement. Sexual inhibitions are cast to the four winds as the bravest of the night stalkers step into the circle and strut their stuff for the crowd.

'I see you Baby!' ... 'Shakin that ass'

As a rule street performers normally stick to their own patch of turf, but it was so packed this particular night that a group of us decided to time share on a newly laid red brick piazza a little way off the main drag. Our three band co-operative consisted of Morty and myself, a clowning performance troupe called 'Folk You Mate' and a pre-teen busking ensemble known as 'The Wallies' from Nimbin. The pint sized performing foursome were always a big drawcard because of their age and before they had even laid out the case there was a wall of people around us. With a mowhawked and glitter sprayed Nine year old named 'Emu' as their frontman the Wallies played a selection of hard hitting issue related songs that were composed by myself and elders of the Nimbin tribe. There were about fifty people in the circle when the kids started playing, but the audience instantly swelled to about two hundred when the cops moved in to break up the fun. A baton swinging patrol officer and his partner wanted to know who the parents of the kids were and they were promptly set upon by Emu's mother, the ever outrageous 'Francesca'. You might remember her as the woman who flashed her tits at the Queen on one of the royal visits. Or perhaps you can recall the nude female bather at Bondi Beach who was arrested for wearing a painted on bikini. Francesca informed the coppers that the kids were in her care to which they turned on their heels and proceeded to leave the circle. As they departed from our midst they were pelted by scraps of takeaway food and the spray of vigorously shaken cans.

Folk You Mate were doing their thing when the second wave of uniformed party poopers descended upon the crowd. Six officers pushed their way into the circle and declared that our music was too loud. The crowd just laughed in their faces and we were quick to inform them that we were not using any kind of amplification. Full cans of beer and whole hamburgers rained down from the neon lit sky and the cops retreated to hearty shouts of abuse. The numbers had swelled dramatically by the time Morty and I commenced to play. After the sweet and innocent displays of the children and the clowns the crowd were ready for some foot stomping adult entertainment. We hit them with a ball tearing rendition of 'Roadhouse Blues' which was followed by 'Brave Captain' and a version that would have made Tom Waits proud.

'SO WON'T YOU TELL ME BRAVE CAPTAIN

WHY ARE THE WICKED SO STRONG?

AND HOW DO THE ANGELS GET TO SLEEP

WHEN THE DEVIL LEAVES HIS

PORCH LIGHT ON?'

We were belting out the chorus in full gusto when the foot coppers invaded our party again. A mean looking, old police sergeant led the charge and screamed through a megaphone that the crowd had to quietly disperse. If not he said that we would, "All Be Arrested". As he bellowed out commands our kerbside setting was flooded by light from an approaching police helicopter. The crowd had grown to become a five hundred strong mob of punters who were not in the mood for another interruption. Scuffles began to break out. Mort and I took the initiative in the very same moment and used the newly arrived overhead lighting to our advantage. We circled the Police sergeant in a Marks Brothers kind of way and repeated his words for the punch happy crowd, "You're going to arrest all of these people". That was all it took for a peaceful Friday night busking show to turn into a full blown riot. Mort and I were led off to the Kings cross lockup along with nine other people from the crowd. We spent the night playing two up in the in the cells and in the morning they let us go after bullshit charges were laid. One of the audience members was a pregnant woman and apparently she had slugged an attending officer right in his stupid looking moosh.

As well as being a free roaming minstrel and party animal Morty was also a part time Actor. He has appeared in numerous Australian television productions and more recently he worked alongside Nick Cave in an arthouse flick called 'The Ghosts of The Civil Dead'. Being a subscribing member of the Actors guild Mort was provided with an Equity lawyer who took up his case with a passion. He based Morty's defence on oppression of artistic rights and turned a seemingly minor event into a complex four day hearing.

The cops couldn't have imagined it was going to escalate to the point it did and the Actors equity lawyer had them running scared. None of the attending officers were allowed to consult with each other about the case and the only cop who could remain in the courtroom was the old Serge. He moved uncomfortably in his chair as every minute detail of our busking debacle was examined. The presiding Magistrate was a lovely old Gal by the name of Helen Larkin. She conveyed an air of stern, yet amused authority as the unfolding events were described. It became apparent on the first day that she was dealing with accusations of police misconduct and as each damning fact was revealed the mug coppers were subject to her scorn. Most of the other defendants were assigned law society barristers but I decided it might be fun to conduct my own defence. This was living theatre that had crossed over from the street to the courtroom and I embraced the part I had to play with relish. By the time it was my turn to speak the Equity lawyer had already wiped the floor with the cops. It was found that they copied each others reports when they realised we were building a defence and long hours were spent sorting out which officer actually copied who. Each of them was put through the grinder by our team of lawyers then the nice old Judge gave them police conduct lectures before they left the stand. The costume that I wore for our days in court consisted of the sharpest threads I could put together. My black leather pants were buckled at the waist by a miniature silver handgun that gave a hint of possible danger as it embellished the overall look of a saloon hall gambler. Studs and other shiny decorations adorned my swaggering butt and there were sparkling dollar sign spurs around my snakeskin boots. I wore a yellow and black pinstriped jacket with rounded lapels and a red scarf hanging out of the pocket. Whenever I was consulting with an officer in the stand I made a point of placing my hands on my studded hips and revealing the handgun buckle. From time to time as I acted out my Perry Mason fantasy I would pull the red scarf from my pocket and delicately wipe my brow. Mort's lawyer kept slipping me little notes across the table about the questions I should ask and I was like his learned partner throughout the four day trial. I think the Judge was quietly impressed by my untrained legal skills. Our supporters in the stalls were kept well entertained as the shame of the coppers brought screams of delight and merriment. Rowdy laughter coming from the courtroom was a regular feature of the proceedings as nervous rookie coppers shuffled their feet and bit their nails in the hall. I spent the days leading up to our case wordsmithing a three page statement which I was permitted to read to the court. It attacked the very system that allowed for such blatant artistic oppression and singled out the premier of the day as a fascist in the first degree. The New South Wales premier at the time was the 'not so honourable' Nick Greiner, who had recently overhauled the Summery Offences Act giving the police a host of sweeping new powers. Out on the streets people were being arrested for silly infringements like sitting on milk crates to watch the buskers play.

The Summery offences act was seen by many as the first step towards a police state in New South Wales and our case was at the cutting edge of emerging public resistance. In my address to the court I pointed out that I was the son of a Hungarian Theatre Director who had sought asylum in Australia after escaping similar oppression in the homeland. I condemned the Summery Offences Act as a tool of public censorship and likened it to the suppression of free speech by the Nazis during Hitler's reign of terror.

In a final crescendo of passion I informed the court that the premier himself was a post revolution Hungarian. I strongly urged that all charges should be dropped regarding the case and our elected leader should weep in shame for his power hungry ways. The first thing the lovely old Judge said in her summery was, "*I Don't care what anyone thinks I like the Buskers, ... so there!*". The courtroom exploded with loud cheering and laughter as the hearing came to a close. Buskers and audience alike were acquitted and the cops were given yet another scornful lecture on wrongful arrests and false reports. To the best of my knowledge not one of the attending officers was punished for the part they played in the incident. Our combined court hearings ended up costing the tax payer more than fifteen thousand dollars and we heard along the grapevine that the Judge retired in disgust at the whole corrupt affair. As it turned out the busking riot hearings proved to be best publicity that Mort and I ever received. We were invited to perform on Clive Robertson's late night news program along with Emu and the kids and a double page article appeared in the 'On the Street' magazine.

Among the other buskers we were greeted as heroes when next we went out to play and much to our relief the coppers started turning a blind eye to any petty street level infringements. Freedom of speech it seemed had resumed it's place in the realms of the public domain and that gave me an added incentive to get more provocative in the things I wanted to say. The busking riot was the climax of our illustrious street performance careers and it signalled the end of a wonderful era for all of us. In time the humble, guitar strumming bards were replaced by chainsaw juggling gymnasts and fire throwing bikini girls on stilts, which was just too hard an act to follow. With the passing of the years the old busking crew went off to explore new horizons and had families along the way. We still see each other from time to time but alas, I can only cope with so many drunken raves about how things used to be. My busking years were the glory days of this amazing journey through existence and they have provided enough artistic satisfaction to keep me going for a thousand lifetimes.

OFF THE STREET AND ON THE ROAD

**WHEN I WAS A KID I WAS A PROBLEM CHILD.
WELL I DIDN'T FIT IN CAUSE I WAS, BORN WILD.
THEY THREW ME OUT OF SCHOOL WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN
BECAUSE I WHISTLED AT THE HIGH SCHOOL BEAUTY QUEEN.
SO I TRIED MY HAND, AT ANY JOB I COULD FIND.
BUT YOU CAN'T HOLD A JOB
WHEN YOU'RE SINGING ALL THE TIME.
A STABLE EXISTENCE, WAS NOT FOR ME.
WELL I MIGHT BE POOR, BUT AT LEAST I'M FREE.**

CHORUS

**AND I'M, OFF THE STREETS AND ON THE ROAD
BUT WHERE I'M HEADING I, JUST DON'T KNOW.
I'M HERE TODAY, AND GONE TOMORROW,
I'M ON THE MOYE SO DON'T
TRY TO FOLLOW ME.**

**I'VE BEEN SINGING ON THE STREETS FOR TEN LONG YEARS
FOR A PACKET OF TOBACCO AND A BOTTLE OF BEER.
I'VE SEEN THE BEST AND WORST, OF HUMAN KIND
AND THEY CALL ME A LEGEND IN MY OWN MIND.
YEA! BUT I DON'T LISTEN, TO PRAISE OR BLAME
FROM THOSE WHO RIDE, ON THE GRAYV TRAIN.
RETIREMENT PLANS, ARE NOT FOR ME
WELL I MIGHT BE POOR, BUT AT LEAST I'M FREE!**

**AND I'M, OFF THE STREETS AND ON THE ROAD
BUT WHERE I'M HEADING I, JUST DON'T KNOW.
I'M HERE TODAY, AND GONE TOMORROW,
I'M ON THE MOYE SO DON'T
TRY TO FOLLOW ME.**

**WHEN I WAS A KID I WAS A PROBLEM CHILD.
I DIDN'T FIT IN CAUSE I WAS BORN WILD.
THEY THREW ME OUT OF SCHOOL WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN
BECAUSE I GAVE IT TO THE HIGH SCHOOL BEAUTY QUEEN.
I'VE BEEN SINGING ON THE STREETS FOR TEN LONG YEARS
FOR A PACKET OF TOBACCO AND A BOTTLE OF BEER.
I'VE SEEN THE BEST AND WORST OF HUMAN KIND
AND THEY CALL ME A LEGEND IN MY OWN MIND.
YEA! BUT I DON'T LISTEN TO PRAISE OR BLAME
FROM THOSE WHO RIDE ON THE GRAYV TRAIN.
RETIREMENT PLANS ARE NOT FOR ME
WELL I MIGHT BE POOR, BUT AT LEAST I'M FREE!**

**AND I'M, OFF THE STREETS AND ON THE ROAD
BUT WHERE I'M HEADING I, JUST DON'T KNOW.
I'M HERE TODAY, AND GONE TOMORROW,
I'M ON THE MOYE SO DON'T
TRY TO FOLLOW ME.**

**MANY THANKS GO OUT TO ALL OF THE PLAYERS
I WORKED WITH THROUGH THE YEARS.**



**PHIL LAWS - SHANE MUSGRAVE - IAN MORTIMOR - EMU - THE WALLYS - JERRY BRADLY
DAVID BORNSTEIN - DENNIS AUBREY - PETER HEAD - KEVIN BORICH - STEVE WILLIAMS
GWYNE ASHTON - TONI ALLAYLIS - JEFF DUFF - BRIDGET O'DONEHUE - PARRISA BOUAS
IAN PURDY - TEWI RICHARDS - ART STORY - JEFF KINSELLA - TONY KISHOWI - RUA - NUI
ENRICO - DOUG WILLIAMS -- KAI HANDEL - CHRIS SWEENEY - STEVE WALL - LEE JOHNSON
JIM FINN - JOSEPH KHOURIE - CHRIS SINCLAIR - THE FOUR CANAL MEN - DALE RYAN**

Introduction

This collection of fond and sometimes painful memories unfolds amid the turmoil of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the so called 'Free World' our leaders tell us we live in. In my view a truly free world would be a place where human beings are no longer under threat of extinction by members of their own species from nuclear, bio chemical or other as yet un-devised means of mass extermination,. Having narrowly survived a number of near death experiences involving human beings and other assorted causes, time has transformed me from being a hedonistic and seriously complacent party animal into a 'Pro-survivalist' and something of an outsider to the normal flow of civilisation. I'm the sort of person who tries to live the way other people only dream about.

Following the loss of my yacht to the authorities I contemplated what kind of new life experience could possibly top living on a boat with my dog. It then occurred to me that I should come out of retirement as a street entertainer and hit the road busking with my old pal 'Husky boy'. After a failed and aborted attempt to put my tinny into the Hawksbury river bound for the central coast I was forced by circumstance to sit out a snowy old winter with friends in the Blue mountains. I stayed around the mountains for about a year singing my home spun ditties to the mountain folk and pulling quite hansom rewards for both myself and Husky. Having been inland from the coast for longer than I normally like I arranged to have my load hauled to Botany Bay in Sydney where we followed in the oar strokes of the early settlers. We camped on the rivers edge like modern day swaggies and I bought fish and chips on the high street rather than eat any of the toxic seafood I may have caught. Off in the distance across the water I had a rich folks view of the Sydney skyline, but the call to the Northern Rivers eventually beckoned me away to less polluted fishing grounds. This is where I have dropped my anchor for the time being at least and it's the community inspired place I would most want to be should any kind of irreparable collapse in the system we serve bring hardships beyond our control.

Steven Tripp.

7/12/2021



PART TWO OF THE CAPTAINS LOG CONTINUUM

CHAPTER ONE

'MY QUEST FOR THE DEEP BLUE SEA'



Ahoy! There again, all of you **Solar powered, Adult Novelty Enthusiasts'.**

Now! Let's talk about **'ME!'** for a while. So what you would have read thus far (should you have taken the time) covers the period from my highly illegal birth in South Australia to the glory days of my illustrious street performance career, all across this once great country. The next section deals with what happened after I escaped from the dog eat dog 'Rat race' in the 'Big smoke' of Sydney and ventured Northward to begin the first of my many water bound escapades. There's heaps more bad language, drug usage and raucous behaviour up ahead so just try to get over yourself and you might even notch up a giggle or two. Well for starters my interstate wheelchair adventure in a 'big old jet air liner' has been suspended indefinitely due to the ugly raised head of yet another **COVID 19** variant. The **NATURES REVENGE PLAGUE'** as I've dubbed it has infiltrated our frontiers and is causing regional clusters. This makes it more than likely further border restrictions will kick in to disrupt the flow of domestic air travel. Other than hooking up with my daughter Kianna I can't say I'm too disappointed because it's a daunting undertaking for a crippled up old salt like me and my recent literary re-awakening from a decade long hiatus is the best mental and spiritual therapy I could wish for to complete the task at hand and make my journals complete.



To update you on the 'Big Picture'/'Walk in Movie'/'Possible intelligent design simulation' of my life, Old mate Morty' my long time busking partner and 'The friend who was more like a brother' lost his battle with cancer in such a rapid decline that he was playing a gig just two weeks before he was admitted to hospital. I was up north at the time of his eternity bound departure and he was in Sydney, so by the time I got the news it was too late to attend his funeral. My long dormant facebook account was suddenly kick started back into use and it became a critical meeting point for a host of mutual friends who knew Morty. I was thrust out of my mostly lone wolf lifestyle to that of a well connected social media entity as I caught up with the old crew and many a new mutual friend. As I became more savvy to the facebook skills I made a much welcomed reconnection with my twin sister 'Lesley' who I had lost contact with almost thirty years before when she got sucked in by the Jehova's Wittness corporation. Other deaths became known to me around the same time as mort's big exit including 'Emu' another regular busking buddy who tragically succumbed to cancer as well. He was a full blown, dedicated vegan long before it was fashionable and for all the time I knew him he was fit and healthy as a bull.

'FUCKING CANCER'



BUSKING WITH MORTY AND EMU BACK IN THE GLORY DAYS

Perhaps the most shocking news I received was when my thirty year old daughter 'Miranda' called me up to say that her mother (and likely the true love of my life) had jumped from a tall building and suicided. I think one of the main reasons it came as such a shock was because by her actions she was abandoning forever Miranda's twelve year old half sister Lily. It was unbelievable to me because 'Elizabeth' was a well raised catholic girl who placed a great deal of importance on family. So much so that it was the main reason her and I drifted apart due to the fact I was too much of a self absorbed party animal. I have since reasoned that there must have been something critically wrong with her brain functions depression or whatever to do something so drastic.

Out of the blue a while back I got a facebook message from Lesley and in it she said that she had been doing a bit of ancestry research and had unearthed some new details pertaining to the Hungarian side of our family tree. Through the DNA analysis it was discovered that our biological father left Hungary in the company of a wife and two daughters under the name of Jasko and there may also have been two boys left to fend for themselves in the homeland. Through Lesley and a newly acquainted young cousin called kimberly facebook contacts were made with our long lost sisters but I was made aware that both were experiencing hardships in their lives, one with dementia and the other in hospital having a foot amputated. I'd bet my next pension check that she's hooked on those God awful coffin nails. None of our friend requests were ever answered.

'PERHAPS WE'LL MEET SOME DAY,... WHO KNOWS?'



CHAPTER ONE



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MUMMY THERE'S AN OLD HOBO STUCK IN OUR CHIMNEY

The festive season vibe has plateaued for the time being and other than spotting young children playing with new toys and riding new bikes around the place, the only other indication that it's holiday time are all the family packed recreational vehicles on the roads. The new year will bring a second wave of festivities around the Sydney foreshore provided we are not hit with any sudden cluster flare ups and ensuing lockdowns. These are definitely challenging times for people everywhere, but the ones my heart goes out to the most are the primary producers in our food growing areas. Severe drought followed by devastating bushfires, then massive floods is a lot to swallow and then to be hit on top of all of that with a global pandemic. Jesus! I wouldn't blame any of those good folk for ending their torment. Who would? The thing that scares me the most is the fact that the Christmas and new year holiday season will be over and the world will go back to it's normal 'business as usual' mode of being, engulfed in the same old patterns of denial about the global sustainability crisis that are preventing us from doing what is needed to fix it. It was feelings of complete disillusionment and despair as a younger man that made me abandon the futility of living in a doomed society and run away up the river like a modern day Huckleberry fin. The following chapters will describe my journey from the earliest beginnings of my nautical adventures to my final escapades, before the injuries of my youth finally caught up with me.

19/6/1997

'Up The Creek'

The Manzil Room to Springfield's nightclub era was my most productive time as a composer and sound recordist, in spite of all the other naughty stuff I used to get up to. With the help of the musos and studio engineers I connected with I was able to externalize the tunes that were buzzing around in my head and bring them from basic vocal or acoustic versions to finely arranged and recorded productions. As it turned out one of my music industry 'Party Aids' customers was the top sound guy at EMI studios and he had an accumulation of unpaid cocaine and marijuana debts that were owed to me. His bill was scrubbed in exchange for some studio time and for two fantastic weeks I had the use of the EMI facility complete with free Ampex tapes and a sound engineer who really knew his stuff. During the off time periods, late in the night we toiled over the finer details of each track until a batch of my songs were brought to completion. There was no meter running on the clock so it became an all night, track laying party based around the pool room bar. There was a soft drink machine in there stacked up with cold beers.

'SCREW! HEAVEN, I'M STAYING HERE GUYS'

As well as the players I had recruited there were also those from other bands who were recording their albums just up the hallway. All it would take was a line of coke or a joint and I could take my pick of the best artists in town. Don Walker from Cold Chisel was recording there at the time and so was Peter Blakely. The pinnacle of my EMI sessions was a recording that we did with the singer Jeff Duff. As you may recall he was the first nightclub performer I had ever seen back in Adelaide. Having him come along to work on my songs was the ultimate conformation that I had transcended the role of the welfare dependant, hit and run victim and I was making some real headway in the music game. Jeff wasn't into dope of any description and he agreed to sing the vocal tracks purely on the strength of my material. That was a compliment I will never forget from one we should all hold in high regard. The most important song that Jeff and I ever recorded was a symphonic ballad, constructed of lyrics dedicated to Elizabeth who was to become a regular feature during the nightclub era and eventually the mother of my first born daughter. We stayed together for more than ten years but our romantic, free wheeling adventures came to an abrupt end when we found out she was pregnant.

Virtually overnight our Lizzy, my fun seeking partner turned from a carefree party girl into a dutiful young mother and my rock and roll lifestyle was to become the constant focus of her scorn. It's as if her pre-parental antics were just a glittering and seductive charade that promptly ended once my seed was in her womb. The role of the domestically sedated family man is plagued by unreal expectations which can bring more stress than the so called 'good life' is worth. I had too much living to do before it was time to settle down and grow old and besides a shot at the charts was high on the cards for my swag of home spun songs.



IN HAPPIER TIMES

After my attempts at fatherhood ended in a tragic and horrible mess the happy go lucky mood of my song writing changed significantly. I composed a new batch of ballads and soulful laments that were close to the bone and relevant to the actual heartfelt emotions I was going through. The blues like never before became my strongest writing influence and I knocked out one anthem to lost love after another. Around that time I became associated with some of the better known blues players like Tommy Emmanuel, Phil Manning and Kevin Borich, which brought my vocal expression to more mature, love scarred heights. When Liz and I left the maternity ward with our baby daughter Miranda we moved into the spare room of her family home at Glenhaven North of Sydney. Elizabeth's father was a Judge in the New South Wales legal system and her mother was an educator at the Catholic school just up the road in Dural. From the moment I set foot in the door I was made to feel that my creativity was a pointless waste of time and I should adopt a normal vocation to support my new family. It even got to the point where one day Liz's mother said, "Steven, ... All of this 'Save the Planet' stuff is very commendable, but you can't ever expect to make any money out of it". Jesus how is anyone ever going to make a difference in the world with that sort of capitalistic negativity at every turn? In the end I just gave up on any form of philosophical or social debate with her folks and counted the moments until I had sold enough dope to leave. Liz, myself and the bubs eventually got a place in Stanmore and I set up a live in studio in the back lane shed. I worked on my music tirelessly and brought in some great freelance players to record the songs that I didn't as yet have on tape. Elizabeth used to love my busking shows but she displayed little faith that I could come up with any hit songs.

After a while she started to make snide little suggestions that I should get a proper job and she sounded just like her old lady. After the constant nagging started we became volatile strangers living under the same roof and our newborn baby daughter was caught in the unending crossfire of passion and contempt. I eventually packed my bags and moved out with a broken heart and a newfound disillusion for the promise of eternal love.

Kevin Borich used to invite me on stage at the old Manzil and out of those informal jam sessions came a musical collaboration which has lasted through the years. As well as touring with his own band 'The Kevin Borich Express' Kev used to do gigs with Jimmy Barnes, the late Mark Hunter and the incomparable Renee Geyer. He had a twelve track studio in his back yard at Bondi and between touring commitments we used to work on my stuff. Kevin particularly liked my rocky environmental numbers and he grooved to the idea that he was applying his musical skills to a worthwhile cause. We recorded a complete album sized soundtrack for 'Once upon a Planet' which elevated my eco-musical from being just another tin pot hippy cabaret to a more slick and mainstream friendly production. A host of brilliant singers were brought in to convey the unfolding story of the script the likes of Tony Alaylis, Doug Williams and Bridget O'donehue. As well as the soundtrack for the musical Kev and I co-composed and recorded some tracks to include in the other two other albums. They mainly consist of foot stomping boogie shuffles, down home flavoured folk ditties and deep emotional blues serenades, in a slightly minor key. With a swag of recorded material now in hand, big league recording company executives became my prime target in the clubs and smoky bars. Cocaine was the currency through which I bought precious moments of their leisure time as I chopped out free lines and got in their ears about what I was up to musically. It would seem those rage happy industry reps love you to pieces when they're off the dial, but by the next morning they can't even remember your name. Always hussling for a break really started to get me down because it made me feel like a cheese sniffing sewer rat who was lost in a smoky, stage lit maze. The same old assembly of small talking night owls were perched around the same old bars and nothing seemed new anymore. After months of trying to hunt up a deal and getting few results I started to wonder if my club hopping nightshift was even worth the effort. My involvement with cocaine had superseded all of the other drugs on the menu until such time as I couldn't even wipe my arse in the morning without another snort. My nightly busking activities were now becoming well spaced because scoring the next line of demons dust was all I wanted to do.

The sidewalks and bars of Kings cross can be a great place to make a musical start if you've got the youthful drive to sustain it, but you have to get out when your time is done, because the miracle mile is most definitely a dead end street. It was time for a big change of location and lifestyle because my passion for life had subsided into an abyss of uninspired lethargy and none of my expensive habits gave relief to the pain and burning regrets of losing my family.

The night that I stepped off the Sydney drug dealing, treadmill I was trying to hail a cab while dry reaching into the gutter outside of Benny's Nightclub. I hadn't eaten a proper meal for days and my head was revolving in a sickening re-emergence of the teenage head spins. I managed to get a taxi back to a fellow dealers house and crashed out on his couch ill and exhausted for three days. After a week of climbing the wall I decided the only way to kick my coke dependence was to quit the Sydney scene. A break in the Northern rivers seemed like the most practical option so I grabbed my hanging wardrobe and jumped on the first coach bound for Byron Bay. Mort and some of my other long time busking buddies were based in Nimbin at the time but I didn't want to stay there because I knew too many of the local powder heads. The Byron crowd were less familiar to me and I figured I had a better chance of staying away from the spirit crushing clutches of another cocaine rut. I scored a studio apartment shortly after I arrived in Byron Bay which was incorporated into a large community art complex known as 'The Epicentre'. It was filled to the rafters with world class talent and the collective focus was on creative productivity more than anything else. In the company of so many free roaming intellectuals and artisans my mind began to clear of all the big city nonsense I had been involved with and I felt myself becoming a more sane individual with each new day. The post cocaine heeby jeebies and debilitating cramps seemed to become less frequent and before I knew it I was clean as a whistle, tanned and getting athletic by the sea.

My normal attire of big city type stage wear was discarded in the sub tropical heat and I got back into a more beach bum style of threads. I started growing little dreadlocks so I would look like all of the other jumping gnomes and I lived for the next sensory explosion in the land of the rainbows. My tribal home. The cafe scene in Byron is where the artistic community and naevi political activists congregate to sup on expensive coffee and conspire to save the world. The new age of free thought and enlightenment is in full swing among the well to do bistro set and as well as keeping a mans mind sharp it can serve as a fruitful environment to attract financial support. Back then I was driven by the notion that some wealthy 'New Age Philanthropist' was going to be taken by my eco-crusade and would help me to attain my unreachable star.

The closest I ever came to unearthing a serious project backer was when a seemingly wealthy entrepaneur got it into his head that I was 'the next big thing'. At the top of his list of mad plans he proposed a global music industry debut which would involve me and my busking buddies flying to the states and embarking on a musical tour along the old Mississippi river. Our paddle steaming roadshow would take the form of a televised documentary which would ensure mainstream release and make 'The Roadside Attraction' Busking band a household name. I found out along the bush telegraph that my over excited fan had left a trail of embezzled investors scratching their heads amid a history of shonky, hair brained schemes. It's a good job I found out early in the game or I might have ended up stranded and broke in some far off airport or river delta town.

As part of my north coast beach bum lifestyle I started reading a lot of new books as I lazed around on sun kissed shores with a baited line in the surf. Of all the books I read during that period 'How to win friends and influence people' had the greatest impact because it taught me how to make a good impression in a sea of extrovert souls. All you've got to do is be the loudest but most substantial contender and then learn to shut your gob as all of the others have their say. It wasn't long before my spontaneous theatrics were noticed by those who mattered in the upmarket party scene and I was welcomed into their fold. I found myself being driven to many a lavish affair in BMW's and Mercedes Benze, by stinking rich old party boys who were easy to get laughing and separated from their cash. I suppose they admired my dashing brand of self confidence and they approved of how I sang and told poems to all the pretty young girls. The dirty old men around Byron are rampant and I guess any hint of a youthful flirtation is worth the expense to a wrinkled, lonely eye.

I reconnected with many of my old activist comrades who were living in the Byron Shire and keeping the developers on their money hungry toes. It just so happened that my new acquaintances on the party circuit were those very people and it felt like I had infiltrated the camp of the enemy. The proposed new Club Med resort for the Bellongil estuary had the local activists in an uproar and there were regular rallies and protests being held in the streets of Byron Bay. The Chief executive of the planned complex was staying in the area trying to soften up the community and in his attempts to win public acceptance for the project he actually offered me a job. I went along with his drunken ramblings about how I would supervise the entertainment at the new resort and the dirty old root rat laughed with pure delight when I told him we might include a 'Feral Cabaret Spectacular' in the festivities.

The Byron Bay Environment Centre was the main headquarters for the whole Northern rivers protest movement and it kept me well informed on any frontline actions in the area. The word around the campfire was the next big blockade was going to take place at the Chealundi state forest, in the hills just outside of Grafton. My coked out extravagance in Sydney had almost turned me into an apathetic shmook! so I decided to make up for some lost time and join the convoy. I departed from Nimbin with Morty and some of the other buskers in a souped up V8 Holden that belonged to Gerry our T chest base player. All of us had outstanding fines and warrants that could land us in the slammer so it was agreed we would do our tour of duty as 'The Entertainment Patrol'. In the weeks leading up to the first assault a virtual army of activist were mobilised and a fully equipped basecamp was established inside the restricted zone. By the time we arrived it was absolute mayhem and the Chealundi clan spoke of police brutality worse than any they'd ever seen. Everyone was exhausted from days of hectic protest action, but they just kept on fighting as the resistance grew in strength. Protesters converged on the blockade from across the nation and the police force grew in numbers to deal with the swelling crowds.

The day after our arrival the first wave of hard line, mug coppers were relieved of their frontline duties, due mostly we suspect to public complaints. They were replaced by a far more civil breed of officers. The most dedicated of our tree spikers and boulder rolling track blockers had been rounded up and arrested, so cautious negotiations were being initiated between the opposing sides. Now all the cops had to deal with was the mass of tangled chains and padlocks which bound our people to logging equipment and trees. Tri-pods and quadrupeds were erected at key locations around the frontline and access points both into and out of the logging area were blocked by triangular wooden structures. There were activists chained all over them from the base to the crows nest way up high, where the pole sitters held their ground in heartfelt defiance.

We found out through official channels that the police had received special new orders in relation to removing protestors from their perches. At a previous protest action a tripod sitter had sustained a broken back due to lack of care by the cops and he was awarded a massive insurance payout by the Federal Government. Now all removals are handled by a special crack team of emergency experts who's main objective besides getting us out of the forest is to avoid any hefty insurance payouts. The dismantling of each obstruction held up the logging operation for long periods and often days at a time. The Emergency guys were in no hurry to lose their jobs through a rushed removal and their task became an almost scientific procedure. The name of the game on our part was to erect tripods in the most inaccessible places so the cherry pickers couldn't get close without knocking them down.



'JUST LIKE A TREE, THAT'S STANDING

BY THE WATERSIDE' ...

'WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED'

The frontline protests were being documented on numerous video recorders by our people and the cops knew that their every action was being stored on tape. Camera crews from all of the national networks were covering the event and their stories were being broadcast Australia wide. In some cases the Chealundi blockade even made the international press and the army of cameramen and reporters enjoyed our frontline theatrics. Many of our mid blockade performances were used to supplement news footage and I saw my moosh on the six o'clock news every second day. The best protest manoeuvre I saw while I was at Chealundi was a quadruped which had been obstructed from reach by a brightly muraled and wheelless Toyota van. The greasy wheel hubs were dropped on a series of parallel concrete pipes which were partly buried in the ground. In each of the pipes there was a teenage kid who was chained up by the ankles, wrists and head. They were a brave young group of activists and their hair raising stunt came close to disaster when one of the pipes began to crumble under the weight of the van. Ever so slowly a crane inched it's way along the narrow forest track and the multi-coloured vehicle was eventually hoisted clear of the pipes.

The last we saw of it was a cloud of dust as the police pushed it down a steep pristine embankment. When the word came through that we had scored a federal court injunction at Chealundi the scene was transformed overnight. The coppers relaxed in their heavy handed approach and it turned into a tribal victory dance for the protest community. Expressions of tribal solidarity were the main feature of otherwise peaceful days as straight, suburban looking people and senior citizens danced arm in arm with the freaks and sang 'We Shall Not Be Moved'.

Morty and I were to become something of a hit with the more spirited of the police women and we even had the husky riot squad guys laughing at our cornball jokes. The comedy routine that was most effective in titillating the lines of stern police faces was a thing we did from the soundtrack of *A Space Odyssey 2001*. All that was needed was a well placed, 'Open the pod bay doors Hal' and the fabricated masks of forced officialdom broke into smiles and mischievous grins. The bulk of the attending police battalions must have been *Space Odyssey* freaks as well and we just happened to hit on a common tribal humourism.



CHILLING OUT AFTER THE LAST ASSULT

One morning I woke up in the back of Jerry's car with my foot being tapped by a happy go lucky old police sergeant. He sounded just like any of the country bumpkins I knew back on the farm as he said, "Come on bloke, You can't sleep all day, ... you've got a show to do". Fuck me sideways!, ... it's turning into a bloody love festival. Excuse me Sarge but aren't we supposed to be enemies? The campfire parties we had at Chealundi were fuelled by the knowledge that we had stopped the logging industry in it's plunderous, clear felling tracks. Towards the end of the blockade our main strategy was to drain the dwindling police budget and expose it through the media as a waste of public funds.

In time all of the money dried up and the law exodus from the forest amid a chorus of hearty cheers. Ian Cohen who went on to become a respected Green Politician had once hung off the bow of a nuclear ship to protest the military madness of our war mongering little planet. Ian was a key inspirator of the whole Chealundi campaign and he was right in among the action at those heated frontline scenes. Ian took me and my busking buddies on a special bush walk into the escarpment which was accompanied by a well informed commentary. He could name all of the endangered trees and native species that we were working to protect and we stopped from time to time just to take in the awesome views. As we took our little nature walk the most devastating vision to greet our eyes was the long range view of the gaping logging scar from a nearby ridge. I fell to my knees and had an unexpected catharsis as I reeled at the vision before me. I think that occurrence was my true initiation into the spirit of our cause and never since have I felt more emotional about our quest to save the trees. It's as if everything that had happened in my life was leading up to this one moment, where the evidence of human greed was made manifest in the destruction of so much pristine wilderness.

The 'Epicentre' in Byron bay was situated in an old whaling station that had been converted into a modern, well equipped community art facility. The place was owned and run by a couple of 'New Age' inspired brothers who had a grand vision of art and spirituality under the same gigantic roof. One of them was a wealthy, gay art buff who housed and supported the local talent while the other was an ardent guru follower who arranged Australian tours for an Eastern mystic known as 'The Holy Mother. Incorporated into the acres of studio and workshop space there was an Indian restaurant which was run by the artists and it served as an important tribal venue in the area. After the Chealundi victory a series of parties were thrown in the restaurant and surrounding gardens and this is where our resident DJ's and lighting guys pioneered the early evolutions of the 'Epicentre Doof'.



Techno-delic images and sounds blasted the senses from Friday night until early Sunday morning and that it seems was barely adequate to satisfy a growing public demand. The dance parties became so big they were moved out of the restaurant to an enormous steel and aluminium, restored slaughter house. Our regular weekend dance marathons were extended to include full blown mid week dance parties where very large and out of it gatherings were the accepted norm.

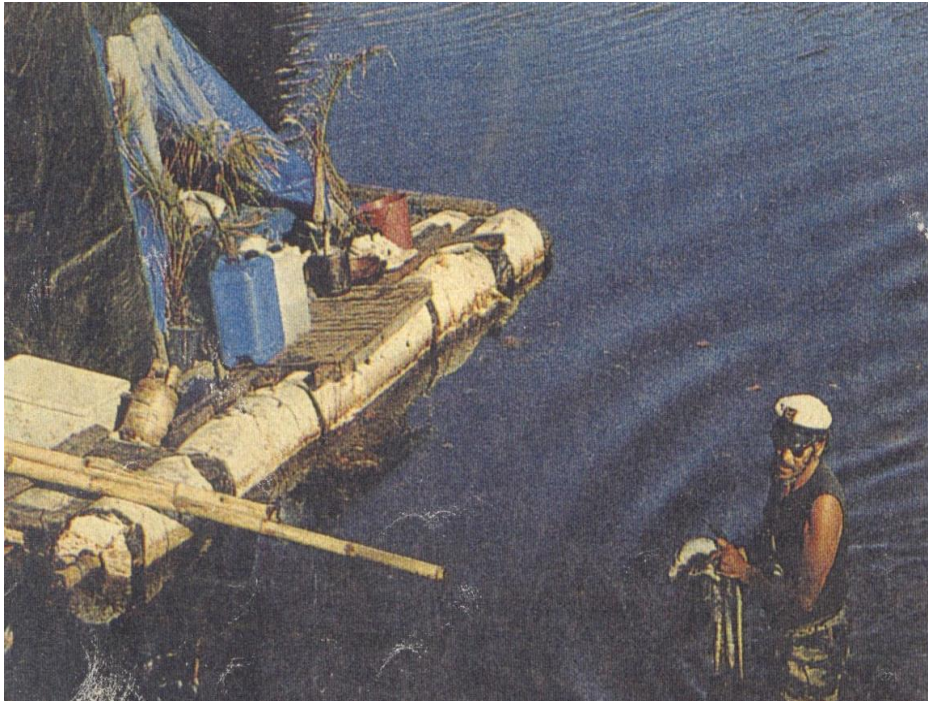
***'I see you baby, Shakin that Ass, ...
Shakin that Ass, ... I see you Baby!'***

I was living in an upstairs studio apartment which copped the full blast of the music as it echoed up through the metal halls and corridors. I had started writing the very first draft of the 'Once upon a Planet' storyline on a portable, Amstrad word processor and I found it almost impossible to concentrate on my work. Besides the constant barrage of techno sounds I was also distracted by a never ending stream of my fellow artists who kept breezing in to score pot. I had been trying to restrict my dealing activities to the cafe's and bars, just so I could finish the manuscript but still they kept rolling in to scatter my thoughts to smithereens. The art complex was undergoing restorations and the noise of cranes and jack hammers just added to my grief. I needed an absolute interruption free work environment so I could keep my thoughts together and it suddenly dawned on me that I should construct a raft on the Billongil estuary and write the script on my portable word processor. My vision of an interruption free home base soon turned into hands on action and I started gathering up discarded restoration waste from the centre. I stored anything useful I found in my palm sheltered roof top garden and started counting the moments until I could have some peace and quiet in a new location.

Danny was one of the artists in residence at the centre and he used to construct impressive, arty furniture with metal that he had recycled from the site. I got Danny to apply his welding skills to an old golf buggy I had fitted out with mountain bike wheels. The final creation was so sturdy that we could ride it like a rikshaw around his cluttered workshed. I transported my assorted tools and building materials down to the creek on the newly constructed buggy and for days I toiled in the stifling, sub tropical heat. Eventually I was sitting inside a pyramid shaped, flat water vessel that floated like a cork and looked like something from 'Apocalypse Now'. The pontoons for the raft were made of long bamboo poles which were covered with polystyrene foam from around the rusty old piping in the meatworks. The foam sections were covered in a layer of plastic sheeting that I acquired from a friend of Danny's who was in the building game. The cabin area was formed by two large triangles that were made of round treated pine. The pine wood triangles sat on a bolted timber frame and were fastened at the central connecting point by re-cycled nails and discarded twine. The whole thing was then covered with tarps and mosquito netting to keep the biting, stinging wetland bloodsuckers at bay. Once established in my new home I stayed out on the estuary for days at a time. I was more than content to just take in the ambience of my new surroundings and bang away on the twelve volt powered word processor among the wonders of the mangrove swamps. My solar powered battery pack was sufficient to run the computer, a light and a small radio TV all day and all night if I wanted.

The only time I rode my pusbike into Byron was to pick up supplies or watch a band at the Rails Hotel. When I had composed a significant block of text it was saved on a floppy disk and then eagerly turned into hard copy at the environment centre in town. As I powered along with the story in my peaceful retreat, rare glimpses of nature in it's spectacular everyday flow taught me how to truly appreciate my situation. I came to perceive of myself as a mere speck in the infinite grid of life and I learned how to draw inspiration from the smallest event in the wilds. In time even the biting mosquitoes seemed vital to the over all perfection of my world.

Often I would wake up in the morning to a spoonbill or a crane snuffling for yabbies in the tidal mud just a couple of feet from my shade cloth doorway. It was not unusual as I cleaned a fish by the bank to have large, swooping sea eagles dive down and pluck the discarded intestines off the water. The most amazing thing I saw on my up the creek adventure was in a sheltered lagoon near an old railway bridge that crossed the estuary. A school of baby mullet were breaking the surface in the moonlight and a group of tiny bats were flitting between them in mid air. My method for moving the raft from one location to another up and down the estuary was a sturdy, sun cured bamboo pole. It was strong enough to lever me through the boggy tidal shallows and long enough to touch the bottom in the deepest parts of the creek. The start of the Christmas tourist invasion promised increased road traffic and noise in my secluded lagoon, so I decided to move the raft a little further up stream. As I was manoeuvring out of a narrow inlet into the main flow of the estuary I spotted some small bait fish swimming erratically on the surface. I thought it might have been some kind of mating display but they didn't attempt to swim away when I disturbed the school with my pole. I scooped up a net full of the fish without any difficulty and when I examined them closer it appeared they were close to death. At the mouth of the inlet I found a dirty great flathead laying belly up in the mud. It was dead as a doornail and it wasn't long before I discovered more dead and dying fish. Once in the main body of water I beheld a sight that I hope I never have to witness again. Every imaginable type of fish eel, crab and even a waterbird were floating lifeless and bloated on the surface. Nothing was spared. I even found a red bellied black snake fighting for it's last breath, as it writhed and twisted among the mangrove roots. The riverbank on both sides was stained by a yellow, bubbling scum and a multi coloured chemical slick, similar to the spill from an outboard motor but a whole lot worse. Up on the railway bridge a group of people had assembled and among them I spotted my comrades from the Environment centre. Samples of the water were being gathered in glass jars from the slippery banks and I was enlisted to fill a container from the furthestmost reaches of the swamp. Bob Cummins a local freelance reporter and activist was running around with his video recorder collecting footage of the fishkill. With a stills camera and a tripod strapped around his neck and shoulders and the Hi-8 video camera above his head he waded knee deep and cursing through the poisoned water. Bob finally got to where I was moored on the opposite bank and asked if I wanted to do an interview. He said it would put a great angle on the story to include a 'Huckleberry Finn' type of river man's perspective in his article.



THE BIG FISH KILL IN THE ESTUARY

As Bob was setting up his video camera he told me about a folk musician from the sixties called 'Pete Seger', who had gone to live up the Hudson river in a raft, as a statement to protest the rising pollution in the North American river systems. After hearing this intriguing story I felt like I had been selected in some way by circumstance to continue the crusade to protect our waterways. Bob managed to get the tripod perched on a high bank so he could get some good overhead shots of the raft. As I was waiting around for him to get started with the interview I took in the long range view of the carnage and my anger began to gather steam. I had been so busy helping to gather water samples that I hadn't really thought about how the fishkill made me feel. By the time Bob had set up the shot and commenced the interview I was a raging ball of passion with a lot to say about the grimness of the scene. I gave an articulate account of the trail of dead fish I had followed out of the inlet, but as the questions were being fired I was not relating to the camera at all. Instead I was gathering up armfuls of the floating corpses and throwing them into a large fish container that I kept on the raft. Each newly filled tub was dumped on a growing pile of dead fish, eels and crabs as I strived to maintain a steady dialogue about the inadequacy of the Byron Bay sewage system. At the crescendo of my fish gathering routine I stood over the grim catch and confronted the camera with an accusing address. I pointed at the pile of rotting carcasses and declared to the viewer, "That's not a pile of dead fish you see there, it's a symbol of our own doom, if we don't strive for global sustainability". Bob's article came out a few weeks later in a national tabloid called the People Magazine. Apparently his Huckleberry Finn perspective was the thing that sold the story to the Editor. Though the publication it was hoped that a wider audience would be made aware of what happens when the sewage infrastructure of a small tourist town gets overloaded.

An article appeared in the local Byron paper a few days after the fishkill which was full of shire council bullshit and a cover up grand in scale. The lying mongrels said the cause of the fish kill was a recent influx of cornflake seaweed which blocked the gills of the local fish population. I was living right there among it all and I knew for a fact that the seaweed had washed out with the tide a few days earlier. A couple of pages over in the same paper the local Mayor announced the forthcoming construction of new council chambers in the township of Mullumbimby. It was budgeted at an estimated thirteen million dollars and when completed it would rate as one of the most contemporary building designs in the Northern Rivers. If there was any justice in the world those dirty Chardonnay sipping arseholes would be made to conduct their service to the community from a riverside location right near the outfall pipes that poisoned my beautiful home.



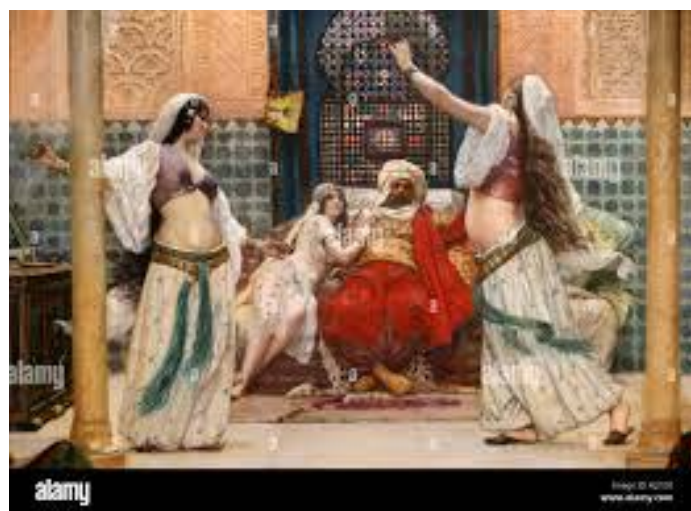
HUMAN WASTE
THE TIDE RETURNS
TO IT'S HOME IN THE SEA
FROM A RIVER THAT HAS TRAVELLED
OUR POISONED SOIL
WASHED IN THE FLOW
OF A THOUSAND SEWERS
IS THE SEEPING SCUM
FROM THE WORLD OF MAN.
DOWN THROUGH THE RAPIDS
GO A TONE OF DEAD FISH.
CAUGHT IN AN EDDY
OF HUMAN WASTE
AND THE CATCH OF THE DAY
BRINGS A SEAFOOD PLATTER
WITH A SLIGHTLY
PETRO-CHEMICAL TASTE.



CHAPTER TWO

'DARLING CAN YOU GET THAT DIRTY GREAT CRAB OUT FROM UNDER THE BED?'

I don't know when my final moments on this planet will occur but whenever they do I think I'll have a private smile that I lived a full and interesting life as the captain of my own ship. Because I'm such a stubborn and hard headed person to get along with it's probably a miracle that I sustained any kind of long term relationships with members of the fairer sex. One night stands and short flings with an assortment of casual lovers are what I'm probably best suited to and when it comes to navigating around the mood swings and complexities of year in, year out partners my talents always seem to fail me. Mind you if I was a squillionaire I'd be quite open to the idea of being the fat and happy master of a harem of spunkarama's. Of course to be in step with popular trends my little love tribe would have to be based on mutual respect and gender equality. I would have no doubt drafted my list of rules for life around the mansion well in advance of the first applicants and on my approval all that would be required of the lovelies is their signatures on the dotted line. Should any infringements what so ever occur around our love nest they would be promptly dealt with around the woman circle and I could just carry on with the enjoyable business of servicing them all. There is of course an aspect to this kind of thing that it's not unlike a form of prostitution and as a rule most hookers just give me a soft on. Well there's today's sexual fantasy out in the open so now we can jump into the next chapter which surprising enough is about yet another of my failed attempts at love.



HOME SWEET HOUSEBOAT

The fish, crabs, eels and assorted shellfish I harvested in the Billongil estuary had helped considerably to stretch out my fortnightly pension payments and now it wasn't safe to swim in the water let alone digest any of it's toxic fare. The mighty Brunswick river lies just to the North of Byron Bay and it seemed like the most logical location to head for if I was to stay on the water and maintain a diet of fresh, and uncontaminated seafood. I dismantled the raft in a single afternoon and stacked the components on a high bank at the end of a wetland car track. The following day Danny from the Epicentre drove down to the creek with a trailer and we loaded it up to well beyond it's capacity. Danny dropped me and my deconstructed raft off beside a rickety old jetty that sits on the Mullumbimby arm of the Brunswick river. A wet season storm was brewing in the east so we unloaded the gear onto a palm sheltered bank and covered the whole thing up with a canvas tarp. The rain hit shortly after Danny drove off and I spent the night under the tarp trying to avoid a host of infuriating leaks. As is the way in the sub tropics the next morning was clear and blue like the fast moving body of water that was my new home. I reconstructed the raft over the next three days, making improvements as I went to the original design. By the time I was up and floating all of my most hard to get at leaks had been patched up. In the more turbulent conditions of a much larger waterway I found my bamboo pole was of little use. It worked ok to push off from the bank but after that all I could do was go with the upstream flow. Eventually after negotiating a number of tricky bends I came to a suitable mooring about two miles from any caravan parks or small talking weekend anglers. It was a shallow, palm sheltered inlet which snaked lazily between fully laden oyster racks and white painted channel markers.

From the raft I could travel into Brunswick Heads by pushbike but it was always done with the maximum amount of physical exertion. The sandy riverside tracks made it impossible to ride all the way and before long a motorised dingy putted into my daydreams with myself adventure bound at the helm. No sooner had the idea come to mind before the absolute deal of the century caught my eye. The boat was sitting in a neat, flowery front garden just near the general store in town. It belonged to a lovely old retired couple who wanted to clear some room in their back shed. I displayed keen interest to the elderly gentleman who owned the boat and he showed genuine sympathy as I informed him of my meagre disability allowance. When I enquired about the possibility of time payment his wife jumped in to say it would be, "Quite alright!". Their names were Stella and Arnold Macpherson and they must have thought I was an honourable man because they let me take the boat on a deposit with the assurance that I would pop in and see them when my next pension cheque came through.

I gave them the last fifty dollars I had to my name as the first payment, but it was well worth the investment knowing I would be motoring along like a true river man, instead of doing battle with those awful sandy tracks.

The South arm of the river was just across the Pacific highway about sixty feet from where we stood and I found the temptation to hit the water too great to resist. I unhooked the engine from it's mountings and dragged the tinny to a ready position facing the other side of the highway. When there was a sufficient break in the traffic I dragged the boat across the gravel shoulder. It scraped and scratched over the bitumen surface in an excruciatingly noisy haul then I had to get it over a concrete divider that stood about a foot high. I had just made it to the opposite side as a convoy of semi trailers came thundering around the bend. With the boat perched on a high bank facing the water I did another couple of trips for my bike and the outboard motor, ducking the busy traffic as I went. There was a narrow vine fringed track leading down to the estuary upon which the boat slid quite easily. I loaded the pushbike into the front section of the dingy after the motor was remounted, then I gently eased my new runabout into the rising tide. The engine fired up with a second pull of the chord and just a touch of choke. Before I knew it I was enjoying my first motorized trip up the river and the sensation of freedom that I experienced no words could adequately describe. The Savage aluminium dingy and Tohatsu five horsepower motor had been well cared for through the years and I ended up getting the whole thing for a little under four hundred dollars. Those wonderful old folk even threw in an anchor and some oars with the deal, which otherwise would have cost me a hundred bucks.

'Fantastic human beings'

Each pension day the boat repayments were at the top of my expenditure list and my newly acquainted senior citizen friends made me cups of tea when I called in to repay their kindness. They listened with great interest as I told them of encounters I had with the wetland wildlife and they loved to hear my most exciting fishing tales. Both had been ardent anglers in their day and I was told about the great catches they had made through the years on the same stretch of water. Often Mr. Macpherson would express how glad he was the boat was being put to good use rather than cluttering up his tool shed. The truth of the matter was the couple were just too old to haul it around anymore and I felt like I had been granted ownership of their final link with joys of youth. The bumpy drag the boat underwent to get across the highway had caused a slight leak just below where the engine was mounted, but it was easily fixed with a small dab of burning 'tar'. The motor didn't miss a beat from the word go and it used so little fuel to get around that a two litre can kept me going for a couple of days.



As a constant mode of transport the boat was a far more practical than any car could have been because not even a four wheel drive would have got close to where the raft was moored. Whenever I needed to pick up more fuel and supplies I simply pulled up at an oyster lease mooring right behind the local shopping centre at Ocean Shores. The run from my campsite to Mullumbimby took a little over an hour and once I got there I could tie up under a bridge right in the middle of town. If ever I needed to score some Mexican Dancing Tobacco or spend some time with people it was just a short walk from the river to the 'Dropout Lodge'. I was living as far away from the party circuit as I could possibly get but Bill and the crew always had news of the next rage that couldn't be missed. My script was less than half complete and I rarely got more than a few pages written before another tribal event came up. On those glorious occasions where I just got to hang out in the raft and download my imagination onto the laptop it was the closest thing to contentment I've ever known. One time during a bout of the mental blocks I was pondering where I should place a song called 'Rainbow Dream' among the text and the dialogue in the story. A sun shower started to fall as I agonised over the problem and a full ark rainbow suddenly appeared above my secluded inlet. It was like some kind of divine revelation which instantly dissolved the mental block and landed the song in the most appropriate point of context it ever could have found.

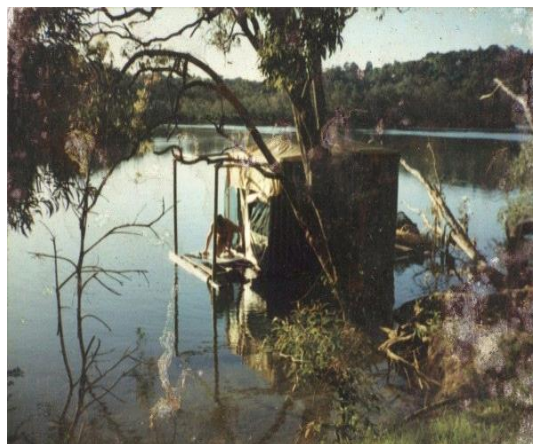
Living on the raft was even more compact than camping in the transit because there was only enough room for my outstretched bedroll, with about a foot either side for other stuff. A full sized houseboat seemed like an appropriate progression in my river dwelling odyssey so I started keeping an eye out for bits and pieces I could use to make it a reality. Up the river close to Mullumbimby there were some patches of tall bamboo leaning into the water from the banks. Large poles had been blown down by coastal storms and those that weren't washed out to sea were perfectly cured in the salty, brackish flow. I gathered the best poles I could find and tied them together in a thirty foot long triangular towline. To get them back to the inlet I had to push against an incoming tide with the outboard motor running at full stick. I rounded the last bend back to my camp as the sun was setting on Chincogan and my bamboo harvest was tied up among the mangroves ready to be stacked with the first light of dawn. Most of the next day was spent deconstructing the raft so I could use it's component parts to build a drying rack for the bamboo. Then for about ten days I slept under a tree slung tarp while I waited for the poles to dry out. I turned the rows daily to get an even spread of sunlight and by the time they were ready to use the sun hardened skins shone smooth and golden. A hacksaw worked much better than a normal handsaw to cut the desired lengths, which would be used for the outer pontoons and the cabin frame. I commenced work on the houseboat from a hastily sketched design I'd done and it was a real test of my mathematical skills to calculate the sizes I would need. The cabin frame had to be reinforced with diagonal cross members which meant that all sorts of weird angled joints had to be cut into the ends of the bamboo.

Just outside of Brunswick Heads on the way to Byron a new housing development was in progress and as yet only the bitumen streets and cul de sacs had been put in place. Underground stormwater and sewerage pipes were being connected to the properties and there were neatly stacked piles of PVC everywhere. With images of the Belongil fishkill still fresh in my thoughts I decided it was my environmental duty to confiscate some of the pipes and thus help to restrict the flow of shit into the Brunswick river. The sky became increasingly overcast as I rolled four of the larger plastic cylinders down to the waters edge. The ends of the pipes were hastily sealed with sheets of clear plastic and gaffa tape to keep them afloat for the trip, then I commenced to tow them back to my inlet in the driving rain. By the time I was eventually tied up at the raft one of the pipes had completely submerged and it was catching snags on the bottom. It took me about an hour to get it free as I cursed the high heavens and groped around underwater in a pelting downpour.

That night trip up the dark and storm battered Brunswick river was my first real test of dealing with the elements while out on the water. It taught me a lot about the real value of advance preparation when embarking on any kind of fast water activities. All of the worst possible kind of unforeseen shit seems to happen at the very moment you don't need them to. As part of my ongoing anger management campaign I have named this most unenjoyable phenomenon 'the comedy of errors without the comedy' and it helps me to see the funnier side of the fuckups that can occur.

One of my main priorities in this life is to learn how to control the stress that can rise up and hinder progress when dealing with man made objects. The storm raged through the night and then subsided with the dawn as the morning sunlight dried the land. I dragged the pipes out of the water and placed them on a reasonably high sandbar where I started the construction of the pontoons. I chose the spot I did because it looked like the kind of high mangrove lined mudflat that only gets flooded on the king tide. The moon had just come into a new end of year cycle so I figured I had just enough time to get my flotation completed and into the water. The four large PVC pipes were stuffed full of polystyrene foam from the raft and sealed with epoxy fastened wood caps to form the inner core of the pontoons. Then by using a system of ropes and overhanging branches I fixed an outer layer of bamboo poles around the PVC with re-cycled seat belts. The king tide came in as predicted just two days after the pontoons were complete and the rising waters lifted them clear of the boggy mud flat. I dragged them over a long, weed covered sandbar with the rising tide and they were tied up in the shallows under a giant mangrove tree. With the pontoons now up and floating I set about making a timber frame which would join them together and serve as the foundation for my bamboo hut. What timber I didn't find washed up on the riverbanks I scored from a moderately priced second hand dealer right near the water in Mullum.

The floor frame was held together by brand new, stainless steel bolts and apart from a bail of twine they were the only new building materials I had to buy. But for a few minor errors my mathematical calculations for the cabin frame worked out just fine. All of the precut poles fitted together nicely and even the tricky diagonal corners slipped snugly into place. I used a whole spool of bailing twine to cover the various bamboo joints and the end result gave the appearance of something out of the Swiss Family Robinson or Gilligans Island. To fasten the cabin frame to the floor I used more recycled seat belts and each corner was attached by an exhaust clamp from off a Mack truck. From an overhanging branch I covered the entire cabin area with a large nursery style shade cloth that had long plastic zippers at both ends. The zippers were a real advantage as they made perfect front and back doors, which would provide some protection in the mosquito infested backwaters. Over the shade cloth I laid a big, yellow tarp which at some stage had been used to cover a coal loaded train carriage. At the front of the vessel the tarp protruded past the end of the shade cloth by about three feet and it formed a lovely little foredeck veranda from which I could drop my anchor and absorb the breathtaking riverside views. My secluded inlet had been the perfect place to put the main structure for the houseboat together but tucked in among the mangroves I was missing out on the more spectacular scenery the river had to offer. Having made no enquiries about things like mooring fees and the like I decided to risk detection by the authorities and tow the vessel onto the main arm of the river, where my view might include the surrounding hills and mountains. The outboard motor proved severely undersized for the task of towing the houseboat. Painfully it smoked and strained like it was on the brink of seizure until I finally reached my new mooring. I dropped anchor on a white sandy bend which was bordered on one side by pristine rainforest and on the other there were large rolling dunes leading down to the surf. My new surroundings were majestic to say the least and the best part was at days end I could watch the setting sun flash gold and orange patterns on the water. The long dead, volcanic culvera of Mount warning and Chincogan loomed in the distant haze of the afternoon and I knew that I was where I was meant to be.



THE HOUSEBOAT STRUCTURE TAKES SHAPE

The structure of the houseboat was pretty well complete but there was still a lot more to do on the inside to make it feel like home. I did regular bamboo runs up the river to gather the precious harvest until the inner walls were lined with spilt bamboo slats, held in place by a thousand recycled screws. Three windows were incorporated into the cabin structure by placing bamboo caps horizontally over the ends of pre shortened poles. At the rear of the vessel I partitioned off a section which was open to the elements but for the shade cloth and this is where I set up my kitchen.

The second hand dealer fixed me up with a caravan sized kitchen sink which I mounted on a bamboo divider extending from the back wall of the cabin. I then installed an old fashioned ice box under the sink which was regularly filled with bags of ice from a nearby garage. The finishing touch to my floating hideaway was an eco-inspired flag which was attached to a long bamboo pole. The flag depicts the encircled continents of the earth on a rainbow backdrop and it was given to me by it's creator the renowned Nimbin artist 'Benny Zabel'. He's the guy that you see at all of the rallies and blockade actions wearing a gas mask and a long, slogan covered black gown. He roars scathing prophesies of doom through a megaphone on the six o'clock news and waves a painted placard saying, 'End The Environmental Madness Of The World!' For the most part I was Engrossed in home improvements in my sub tropical wonderland and the frontline seemed eons away, so that flag helped to make me feel like I was still a part of the movement.



THE WORLD FLAG ON THE HOUSEBOAT

A flag for the planet what a great idea

sing it to the children start today

***A picture of the earth sitting right in the middle
when planetary consciousness is here to stay
and we will let the little children lead the way.***



BENNY ZABEL AN ABSOLUTE HERO OF OUR TIMES

When the ocean tide is at it's lowest the sand becomes relatively firm and it was possible to ride my pushbike the fourteen mile stretch of beach into Byron bay. That was fine if I felt like doing some beach fishing along the way but if not it was just another time consuming drag. A trailbike seemed the most practical solution to my problem so I started checking out the bike stores and newspapers to see what was around. All of the local motorcycle retailers were out of my price range and even the older second hand models were beyond my worth. Bill told me of a mate he had up in the hills who had recently bought a place in Port Douglas and was selling most of his belongings before he moved. As it turned out the guy was a seasoned grower who had been supplying the area with sweet smelling buds for more than three decades. For the sake of the story we will call our Hillbilly marijuana farmer 'Buddy'. Among his vast assortment of agricultural equipment Buddy had a bush battered XL 250 Honda trailbike that he had used since it was new to establish the crops. The mirrors, lights and indicators had all been scraped away over time but it fired up with the first kick and had heaps of grunt left in the engine.

Buddy looked familiar and it came out in our conversation that he had been on the frontline at Chealundi. He was one of those illusive tree spikers who always kept a low public profile but got the job done when it came to saving the old growth forest. Buddy made a little speech about how "Us Activists" should help each other out in this dog eat dog world and he offered me the bike for what ever I could afford to pay. As luck would have it I had just pulled off a scam in Byron where I unloaded some of Bill's weed to a tourist and I'd made a three hundred dollar profit. Buddy accepted one hundred and fifty dollars for the bike and the deal was formalised with a bong session and strong, manly hugs by reunited comrades. The trailbike was given to me by Buddy on the understanding it could never be registered for use on the road. It had narrowly escaped the long arm of the law in a number of high speed mountain track chases and he wanted to leave for NQ assured that it would never be traced back to him.

I gave him my solemn word that it would always remain unregistered as we loaded it into the back of Bill's ute and covered it with a sturdy hemp tarpaulin. We hauled the bike as close as we could get to the river and unloaded it when the sandy tracks finally bogged the ute. I made the stupid mistake of waiting until Bill had driven off before I tried to kick the thing over and guess what? It was a good job I found a tool set under the seat otherwise it would have been a long, sand bogged push back to my camp. After removing the accumulated carbon build up from the sparkplug the third or fourth kick got it moving. The council rangers did regular patrols along the beach in four wheel drives so I had to plan my runs to Byron around their daily routines. A couple of times as I was still getting used to their movements I found myself confronted by a rangers vehicle coming the other way along the beach. Luckily I spotted them when they were well off in the distance and I executed hasty detours into the dunes.

My tyre tracks would have been a dead give away to any over zealous council official so once I was in among the wetland thickets I had to zig zag around a bit to create a dead end track. After the rangers had vanished up the beach in the other direction I scrambled back down the dunes and resumed my trip into Byron. The banks of my little lagoon on the Billongil served as a regular stash spot for the trailbike and any overnight camping gear I might have with me. The bike was chained and padlocked among a cluster of vines and palm fronds that concealed a second pushbike I used while I was in town. The backup treadingly had a plastic covered bedroll strapped to the handlebars and a milk crate full of handlines on the front facing carrier. More than six months after the Belongil fishkill it was still unsafe to fish in the estuary but whiting, bream and flathead were easy to catch just off the beach in front of Strop Cornell's pub.

During the week I kept pretty much to myself just working on the script and making home improvements on the houseboat, but when the weekends came around I devoted my time to checking out the many bands that passed through from Sydney to Queensland. The Rails Hotel in it's hay day featured some good touring acts as did the Beach Hotel and the Great Northern. After I was done partying away all of my spare cash I would lay my bedroll out in the dunes under a pandana tree and wet a line. Groups of young travellers used to get fires going on the beach and they invariably turned into late night singalongs under the enduring lights of the Southern cross. Many is the time I have dozed off to the sounds of a soft guitar or a flute as the first hint of morning lit up the watery horizon. On one of my weekend escapades to Byron I returned to the lagoon and discovered that the trailbike was gone. My thick, metal chain and padlock had been cut with bolt cutters and all that was left was a torn and tangled mess of vines and damaged palms. Immediately I knew that it was the rangers because I had left a plastic bag containing some rubbish leaning up against the back wheel. No other thief would bother to include my waste in their plunder so I set about the task of finding out where the thing was being held.

The council depot was just a short pushbike ride out towards the Pacific highway in an industrial estate and a cautious circumnavigation of the cyclone wire compound confirmed what I already knew. One of my mates owned a surfboard shop adjoining the depot and from his back yard I could see my bike sitting among some other impounded vehicles and water craft. I got straight on the phone to the shire council chambers and without revealing my real name I spoke directly to the Head Ranger. The condescending shit stain informed me in a gruff tone that I had to pay a number of fines before I could have the trailbike back. The fines included riding in a prohibited area and of all things riding an unregistered vehicle. When I said I thought it was police business to deal with unregistered vehicles the ranger just laughed his stupid looking head off.

As it happened the coppers were in the council depot at the time filling out their reports and I was told that I could speak with them if I wanted to. I stayed as calm as I possibly could and made sure that I had the cops undivided attention before I slammed the phone down in an ear splitting, bakelite crash. The fines in total came to over six hundred dollars which was well beyond the value of the bike so short of kissing the thing goodbye my only other option was to try to steal it back from them. In a mood of sheer, justice seeking outrage I made one of those who gives a flying fuck decisions to go for broke, which meant I had to bust into the council depot and retrieve my mechanical stallion. I speculated that my best chance of pulling it off was to bide my time and wait for just the right thundering, stormy night to make a move. Like a crocodile stalking it's prey I watched the movements of the rangers from my mates back yard at the surf shop. I compiled a written list of the comings and goings at the depot and within a week I knew the most appropriate time to put my plan into action. The security vehicle did it's final patrol at 2.30 am and another one didn't come past until 9.15 the following night. If I got away with it the bike would be clear of the scene and stashed in a new location before the dumb fuck, ordinance officers clocked on for a new day of giving people the shits. The skies stayed relatively clear for about five days then at long last a battalion of fluffy thunderheads began to gather above the sea in the East. I could feel the mounting electrical storm in my bones and the onset of a gusty blow signalled the green light to go.



Gary knew what I was up to and he allowed me to remain in his back yard after he had closed up the shop for the night. The bolt cutters that he lent me were smaller than the standard size and I had my fingers crossed that they would be able to get through the new chain the rangers had stuck on my bike. The 2.30 am security patrol completed it's last inspection and the thunderheads were yet to produce a single drop of rain. I waited around for another hour or so contemplating a change in strategy and about quarter to four I just said, "Fuck it" and jumped the fence. The padlock came apart after a few pinching bites from the bolt cutters and on the last cut the chain rattled noisily along the frame. A guard dog started barking in a property adjoining the compound which made me double my speed and break into a nervous sweat. The bolt cutters separated the cyclone wire fencing with no trouble and as I pinched away at the little wire squares the first rumbling tones of thunder echoed around the bay. By the time I had cut the last of the wire the barking dogs were drowned out by beautiful, deep and ominous thunderclaps. It was a tight fit to push the bike through the hole in the fence but I made it out with a couple of extra nips on the wire. Once free of the compound I fired up the engine and rode off in a windy and thunderous downpour. The rain tasted sweet on my tongue as I laughed at the wild flashing night sky and savoured my moment of victory.

An article appeared in the local paper a couple of days after the event which described my noble rescue mission as a 'Theft'. In the article the police claimed they had some leads to go on but I had got away clean and they knew it. The engine and chassis numbers had been long since ground away and I wore a pair of leather gloves to make sure I left no prints. I would have loved to have seen their faces when they discovered my handywork the next day. In real terms I suppose all it would have meant was one less vehicle they could auction off among themselves when next they decided to clear the yard.

I saw my mate Gary at an Epicentre dance party about a week after our adventure and he told me that the rangers had recruited a couple of nasty doberman attack dogs just after I retrieved the bike. I shouted him to an ecstasy tab for his help and we howled at the moon to the pulsing beats of the Doof music. Gary and I were smoking a joint in the gardens of the art centre when we were joined by a regular acquaintance of mine called Carl. This bloke is an older model of party animal than most of my other friends and top shelf LSD is the only stimulant he ever consumes.

Carl was frantically peddling the last of his acid so he could go dancing with some tourist chick he had met in the dance zone. He claimed the tabs were manufactured by the 'Grateful Dead Crew' in the states and they were guaranteed to blow our minds. On top of the eccies we had consumed I treated both Gary and myself to a tab, which freed Carl up to trip the light fantastic with his new girlfriend and the rest of the rhythm struck Doofers.

Within the hour my ecstasy driven love for all mankind was catapulted into a new dimension of hallucinogenic wonders. Gary and I spotted Carl on the packed dance floor at the peak of our trip and the dirty old bastard was making time with a sexy young Maori chick. Her name was Lil and she must have been at least half the geriatric, old root rats age.

Lil and a group of her girlfriends had just arrived on the coach from Sydney and we were the first blokes they had spoken to since they got there. Instantly Gary and I paired off with a couple of the other girls to go dancing and the rest were swooped up by the predators before the next heart racing track split the air. As the night raged on all of the dancing couples shifted positions until it was established where the strongest attractions lay. I ended up with a young redhead from among the flock who was an uncontrollable chatterbox and as frisky as a bucking mare in the sexual lure of spring. Keeping up with that 'sweet young thang' on the dancefloor was more of a bluff than true stamina and I was ready to jump at any opportunity to get her outside to a more comfortable spot. It was impossible to converse over the sound of the blasting trance music so we exited for the bar in the tropical gardens adjoining the partyzone. The girls name was Alicia and as soon as she found out that I was tripping and on E she went into a kind of feeding frenzy. It didn't subside until I called over one of my fast moving drug dealer colleagues and made a score. As the stimulants kicked in we hung out on the beach beside a roaring campfire which had been set up as a chill zone. Guitars were strumming old favourites from the hippy trail as the mood adjusters did their thing and before long Alicia was in my arms and being seductively wooed. We were joined by the others at the fire some time later and Carl agreed to drop us off where I had stashed the Honda. After their very hectic night of dancing he and Lil were planning to chill out in the dunes and Alicia said that she really wanted to see my houseboat on the Brunswick river. Carl's combi couldn't make it all the way into where the trailbike was hidden so we bid them farewell at a highway crossing and walked a short distance into the moonlit swamp. Once we were mobile on the bike I moved at an easy pace along the beach as the stars peeked through rows of ponytail clouds and the moon spread a silvery triangle across the sea. Even though I wasn't going that fast Alicia held on for dear life which got my sexual magneto revving faster than the one in the engine. Along the way we spotted a large flock of gulls that took to the air on our approach and flew in front of the bike for about three miles. I sensed that our slow, windy ride was blowing some of the big smoke bullshit out of Alicia's system and I smiled to myself wondering how she was going to react to my floating castle on the river. After a bumpy scramble through the dunes and wetland terrain we arrived at my campsite and I got a fire going on the bank. The houseboat was illuminated in it's moorings like something from a Hollywood fantasy romance as I scrambled along the half submerged log it was tied to and jumped onto the foredeck.

Then I lowered the gang plank so Alicia could come on board and view my handiwork. When she entered the candle lit boudoir approval showed on her face and the mood was further enhanced with soft ambient music from my battery powered hi-fi. The bamboo mounted double bed was really the only place for us to sit down, so we both did and I proceeded to chat away about my river dwelling adventure until the vertical position was abandoned for a more chummy, horizontal mode.

After an initial stay of only two days on the houseboat Alicia picked up her backpack at the young travellers hostel and moved in with me. That sort of thing was just typical of her spontaneous, get up and go spirit and she adapted quickly to my river dwelling ways. Her presence somehow completed my tropical houseboat adventure and made things even more exciting than they already were. Every morning just after sunrise we would slip naked into the water so we could watch for any sign of our wild neighbours. A water crane or some other such wonderful creature might come into view from beneath the dawnlit mangroves and we would be transfixed by the image from a water level perspective. One time we were treated to a group of wallabies who came stomping through the mudflats at high speed. Alicia was floating face up at the time, and she swore that she could feel the thud of their feet vibrating through the water.



A GOLDEN MOMENT WITH A GOLDEN GIRL

My fishing lines were always cast and waiting in the dingy as we took our early morning swims and the sound of a spinning handline signalled that it was time to get out and prepare breakfast. Without fail a salted pilchard would land us a good sized flathead and mullet gut in a salty brine was sure to deliver a hefty bream. One muggy, cicadae chirping night I couldn't sleep and I was watching the 'Rage' music program on my miniature bedside TV. Impervious to my insomnia Alicia was slumbering peacefully and I wanted her to wake up so we could make love.

Each snugly advance I made was met with little moans of hot summers night discomfort, so I had to invent some way of luring her away from dreamland. The slow distinctive drag of a handline suddenly caught my attention which meant that some late night feeder was walking off with the mullet frame I tossed overboard before we went to bed. The line came up easily from under the pontoons and a dirty great, buck male mud crab was clutching onto the fish frame. I attempted to drop the monster into a bucket by dying candlelight but the thing let go of the frame and scurried off sideways under the bed. Alicia had started to stir with all of the commotion and when I told her there was a crab under the bed she sprung back into consciousness at lightening speed. The offending intruder was netted by torchlight and placed in a sealed bucket for breakfast. I came out from under the bed and Alicia still had her bum in the air scanning the floor with a torch. In that very special moment as I beheld the inviting form of my twenty two year old sweetheart I smiled the secret mischievous smile of a horny, thirty five year old beach bum who was just about to receive his just deserts.



CHAPTER THREE

CHUCK US A COLDY BABE OR I'M OFF TO THE BOOZER!

As with the saying 'An erect penis has no conscience' I was content just rolling along with my current situation and not really giving a rats arse about what anybody thought. Sometimes people would pick up on our age difference but Alicia didn't give a fuck either so it was all ok. Quite often young guys would move in on her thinking that I was her old man or an uncle or something and it was never a problem because she would just tell them that I was her boyfriend. Things were going pretty smoothly until I made the monumental mistake of agreeing to meet her family. I guess we all have to dive into life's as yet unexperienced situations and just live with the consequences, otherwise there'd be nothing for us to learn. Her parents insisted that we take their large family caravan along for extra comfort and I was outnumbered in my attempts to turn down the offer. What a drag and I mean literally. The van was so big and cumbersome we barely made it past 50 mph all the way down to the South Australian border.

After we had escaped the judgemental and claustrophobic discomfort of her family home I think our affair was left somewhat scarred by the revelation that I was not viewed as an acceptable partner by her kin. The usual kind of lovers frictions were forthcoming with time but ours was for the most part an easy going affair. For Alicia as with myself our time on the road was a joyous adventure with each new day bringing us a wealth of pleasure and fun. Things can change and this next chapter describes our ill fated road trip down to the River Murray in South Australia where we eventually went our separate ways and I embarked on an adventure to explore the place without her.

STRANDED!

Alicia and her girlfriends had been planning to do an outward bound course as part of their Northern rivers holiday, but romantic diversions had scattered them in all directions along the way. We bumped into Carl and Lily one night at 'The Collective Unconscious Cafe' in Byron and Lil told us the other girls had gone back to Sydney to resume work at their various jobs. Lily still wanted to do the youth adventure course but Alicia said that she was getting all the great outdoors training she needed just hanging around with me on the houseboat. The couple came out and stayed with us for a few days on the river and the whole time Carl was raving about how he was going to build a floating home as well. Like most of my friends who had seen the vessel he was inspired by my exotic, free rental accommodation, but to this day not one of them has made the first move to live out on the water.

At the peak of the holiday season the waterways police are kept extra busy contending with a flotilla of drunk and reckless holiday makers, so I decided to get a little more daring with the places we dropped anchor. Alicia performed in her usual helpful way as we towed the houseboat with the outgoing tide and as we putted along I could see why she was so attracted to the idea of an outward bound training course. Working the anchor and poling off from the banks became second nature to her as did operating the outboard motor and most of our other river dwelling procedures. At the first of our downstream moves we putted along at the speed of the tidal flow and it was no easy task as we had to avoid time sharpened, dead branches that were protruding into our path on the bends. The wind came up as we were halfway through the move and it started to prove very difficult to manoeuvre through each new twist and turn. As we cleared the last dangerous obstacle before our destination the majestic crescendo to the 'Silk Road' by Kitaro was blasting out of my JBL speakers. We came to a stop and tied up to a submerged log on a farming property just past the caravan park on the way to Mullumbimby. Through the trees and hanging vines we could see the goings on in the van park, but the only people who knew we were there were the passing boaties and hiking wetland anglers. A herd of curious cattle stood at the top of the slope observing our mooring procedure but they soon scattered when I fired up the outboard motor to drain it. The sun had finally come out after a week of driving rain which held promise there might be some magic mushies sprouting around the cow flops in the paddock. As we were soon to discover there were gold tops growing in clusters all over the place, so we collected a few and spread them out on a blanket to dry in the sun. The bank came off the water in a gradual grassy incline which was well suited to the drying of the mushrooms and our drip moistened bedding as well. There was one remaining leak in the lower roofing tarp that I couldn't get at without removing all of the underlining bamboo slats, so we just hung a bucket from the overhead beam and endured an awful persistent drip. As you might have guessed the bucket filled up while we were sleeping and water drenched our bed right down to the mattress in the middle of a thundering storm. Alicia seemed to take domestic discomforts such as this in her stride while I uttered unthinkable curses that can not be found in any English or Hungarian dictionary. Even when her camera fell in the drink she just laughed it off and said, *"I can get a new camera anytime and lots more good shit is gonna happen"*. I chopped some of the sun dried mushrooms into a tasty fish and crab soup and we dined by firelight as a full yellow moon rose above the mangroves. Only three of the mushies made it into the soup as they were fairly large and I didn't know how potent they would be. All of our past tripping experiences had happened at dance parties where there was little chance of exploring each others minds among the high energy music and frenzied crowds. By the time the moon had taken centre stage in the star studded sky we were comparing the fuckedness of our respective childhoods and laughing at the absurd similarities.

We stretched out on a blanket by the fire so as to better scrutinise the evening starscape and gently conversed about the wonders of life in the cosmos. Every now and again I got up to change the music and our conversation continued amid a backdrop of my most treasured original songs. Sometimes Alicia would make me rewind the tape so she could better digest the meaning behind the words. Her mind displayed the same sponge like quality I had known myself when I first started tripping in the company of older people. The night passed into morning and we fell asleep intellectually fatigued, but touched by a mutual sense of connectedness. Having been up gasbagging all night we slept in a bit longer than usual, but the blinding morning sun forced us up by about ten. We were picking up our bedding from the riverbank when a group of startled cattle came running down the track. Between the hides of the cattle and the foliage behind them I spotted the flash of a blue light and heard a short blast of a siren. Then the nose of a crawling squad car came around the bend. By the time the slow moving vehicle had come to a stop in the clearing I was on the houseboat frantically hiding my pot and the mushies in the first available stash spot. I was reasonably confident the cops hadn't seen me jumping on board, because when they were pulling up I just happened to be throwing blankets and pillows in a rear facing window which meant I was mostly obscured from their view. The officers were greeted by Alicia in her usual, chirpy way as I jumped off the log we were moored to and casually strolled over to join them. There was a stumpy, little sergeant and a tall, footy player looking rookie walking towards the houseboat and I could hear that Alicia was delivering a bullshit story about how we were collecting water samples for the university. She spoke loud enough so that I could catch the drift of what was being said and by the time I joined in the conversation our solidarity was complete. My outward bound young adventurer was so in command of the situation that the cops just went along with whatever she said. After she had concluded her rave the old sarge explained in a forced, grumpy manner that we were camping on private property and the local farming community "didn't want to get invaded by freaks" the same way they had in Byron bay and Nimbin. Alicia and I had recently placed sealed 44 gallon drums between the outer pontoons of the houseboat to stop the corners from sagging every time we stepped on board. I was yet to acquire any seatbelts to fasten them on properly so the water pushing them into the timber frame was all that held them in place. The police sergeant struggled to maintain his balance on the narrow mooring log as I attempted to inform him that the houseboat wasn't fully constructed, but it appeared he had his mind set on investigating our home.

At the precise moment I was telling the chief to mind his step he placed his finely polished policeman's boot on one of the untethered drums and down it went. He was so lucky the water pressure from below didn't pop it back into position or it could very well have taken his leg off. Instead it just banged out from under the pontoon and rolled away into the flow of the out going tide.

The overweight copper was submerged to his waist like the proverbial pig in the poke and I distinctly heard the dying crackle of his police radio as he fell in. I noticed his rookie assistant having a concealed little chuckle as he pussy footed around on the log trying to lend a hand. I was closer so I reached down into the cavity and hauled the cursing sergeant out. As he and his secretly amused lieutenant departed for the squad car the sergeant could be heard bellowing, "Five o'clock that's all you've got or I'll bust you both for trespass". Within three hours of our untimely visit by the law the houseboat was concealed at a new location far from the scrutiny of the local farmers or anyone else. The new inlet we found was so far upstream and remote that it could only be reached by a dingy on the highest point of the tide. Our new campsite was separated from the rest of the world by a thick jungle on either bank and a series of shallow channels which were bordered by oyster covered rocks. The pontoons scraped and snarled as we passed over the jagged, below surface terrain and in the process I shredded three of the seatbelts that secured them. Alicia poled us through the narrow, razor sharp canals and I had to wrestle with the outboard motor the whole time to keep the propeller clear of the rocks. We eventually tied up next to a cluster of tall pandanus palms which were rooted to a mound of gigantic boulders at the foot of a rainforest slope. As soon as the houseboat was tied up at the new mooring we dingyed back onto the main river and rode against the tide to pick up my trailbike. Alicia dropped me off at the bikes hiding spot then she took the boat back to our new mooring, as I scrambled through the wetlands trying to find a passable track in.

Things began to get a little too crowded out on the river with the start of the summer holiday season and some of the more enthusiastic boaties had even managed to inch their way into our hazard filled inlet. After just a couple of days at the new mooring I proposed to Alicia that we should camouflage the houseboat so it wouldn't be spotted by any other river users and then split the scene for a while. Quite amicably she agreed with a happy little "A change is as good as a holiday" thrown in so we started making plans about what we should do until things quietened down. Some time earlier I had mentioned a pot growing scam I had thought up that involved a trip to South Australia and a camping trek about along the mighty River Murray. Alicia was keen on the idea and as we spoke she suddenly got the bright idea to use the money she had saved by not doing the Outward Bound course and buy a Landrover for the trip. A plan to hit the road the following day was now in place and every moment from then on was spent preparing for our departure. With much scratching and cursing of the swarming mosquitoes the houseboat was skilfully concealed among overhanging rainforest foliage where a large sheltered cavity had formed through the aeons. The natural waterside enclosure was pretty well hidden from view by a curtain of down hanging vines and creepers which almost touched the surface of the water. Alicia parted the living rainforest curtain as she stood upright in the dingy and the two tangled drapes were tied back out of the way with ropes. The houseboat passed through the opening with only inches to spare on either side and once it was positioned in the shelter it blended in nicely with the leafy, river bank setting. I camouflaged the bike in a separate location about fifty feet away in the bush and covered it with vines.

I was quietly confident that my home was well hidden from any potential intruders but there was no point in leaving anything of value around. My portable recording gear and the computer were ferried to a bush track clearing in the dingy where they were tarped over, along with some of my other stuff. We putted out of our secret mooring for the last time but I did a couple of final passes in front of the vines just to be absolutely certain that the houseboat couldn't be seen from the water. A temporary camp was established in the clearing where our belongings had earlier been stashed and we slept under the upturned dingy, supported by an oar. The next morning after putting out the fire and camouflaging the tarp we motored into Brunswick heads and I left the boat chained up to a post directly in front of the pub. Then we set off on the first available tour coach that was heading for Brisbane so we could track down the right vehicle for our South Australian, pot growing adventure. It took us three days of hunting and bargaining with greedy car salesmen but eventually Alicia was the proud owner of a preloved, yellow Landrover. It looked like it had been to hell and back but there were no oil leaks and everything seemed to work fine. The vehicle ended up costing about five thousand dollars including on road expenses, but compared to what else was around it was a pretty good deal. Alicia had about four grand left in her savings after the 4x4 was acquired so she decided to buy some grass that we could sell to help finance the trip. We made a stop in Mullumbimby on the way back to Brunswick heads and Bill fixed us up with a pound of heads that smelt so strong I had to cover it with half a roll of cling wrap to conceal the odour. We partied most of the night away with the dropout crew and my young sweetheart was initiated into the clan with music, dance and merry abandon.

On our return to Brunswick Heads we loaded the boat onto the sturdy roof racks of the car with the outboard motor strapped neatly underneath it. The Land rover was one of those models with a longer than usual body and wheel base but it still represented a fair challenge to fit our combined belongings into it. As things turned out we managed to fit everything in and what didn't fit in the cabin was stored under the boat with the outboard. As something of a parting ritual I secured my bamboo flagpole from the houseboat onto the bullbar and the global rainbow emblem caught the breeze just like the sail of a pioneering clipper that was reaching out to explore new horizons. We inched out of the sandy riverside clearing in four wheel drive mode and the back shockers were bottoming out on every mound or hollow we crossed. When we eventually hit the bitumen the suspension still banged and crunched and it came as a welcome relief when our load was lightened by many kilos in Byron Bay. I stored most of my un-needed gear at the Epicentre with Danny which made room in the back for a double mattress and a gas cooker. Because Alicia only had her backpack to find room for there was ample room beside the mattress for my four track recorder and a milk crate full of master tapes. The portable computer fitted nicely under the front, passenger seat, and a newly acquired solar panel was permanently secured to the roof. I was really looking forward to our time on the open road as it meant an opportunity to catch up on my creative pursuits and resume work on the sadly neglected script for 'Once upon a planet'.

Wanting everything to be perfect for our forthcoming journey of discovery I proposed that a dog was the only thing missing to make the adventure complete. It just so happened one of the bitches at Quick Bucks Wrecking Yard had recently dropped a litter so we agreed to take a short trip to Port Stephens in the hope of scoring a fluffy little travelling pal. When we got there the litter was eventually located right at the back of the wrecking yard among racks of old tyres and rusting car bodies. We both fell instantly in love with the dejected runt of the litter which had slipped in a sump oil pan and looked like an otter washed up in a coastal spill.



We cleaned him down with soap and warm water and afterwards he bounced out into the sunshine to romp with his siblings for the last time. The standard fee for any of Buck's pups was twenty dollars and the money was handed over gladly for our new mascot. Buck's dogs were leftovers from when he had tried his hand at serious breeding and most of them were descended from pure strains. Our pup was half rottweiler, half long haired German shepherd and both of his parents had papers to verify their breed. After some smoochy, coochy persuasion I got to name the dog 'Rufus' which was inspired by a Chukka Khan album title from the seventies. Alicia loved the pup to death and it seemed like the only time I got to hold him was when she was at the wheel. The rest of the time they were inseparable and you would think she was nursing her own child.

'EEK!'

By the time we got to the Hay plain midway through our hot and dusty road journey we had settled into a reasonably comfortable travelling routine. Alicia was at the helm driving most of the time and I was lost in the world of literary imaginings with my laptop in the passenger seat. Little Rufus had the run of the cabin to burn up his playful puppy energy and when it was time to sleep he just flopped out on our bed in the back. Learning to anticipate his next toilet stop became a shared art and it helped to keep us alert on the vast desert highway. If ever we spotted a recent roadkill we made a point of stopping to check out the carcass. I allowed Rufus to smell the dead snakes and lizards we came across to prepare him for the natural surprises that might lie ahead. Just as his nose touched the sun dried scales of the reptile I made a sharp hissing noise and clapped my hands loudly. Within two days of travelling he started avoiding the dead snakes we found and he would only investigate things like roos or birds and the like. Any recently hit kangaroos we came upon were given a partial roadside butchering and often we dined on char grilled roo steaks under golden desert sunsets.

We arrived on the River Murray at the peak of the fruit harvest season and our waterside campsites were often shared with a jolly band of fruit pickers. Some of them played banjos and guitars which meant that fireside singalongs were a regular feature around the camp. I was able to sing my heart out every evening after the pickers had finished work and were letting off some steam. Knowing they had also picked fruit for a living I mentioned my friends from the chicken farm back in my hometown of Owen. To my surprise the whole clan knew Stan and Calypso and they all spoke highly of them.

It was often the case that the local rangers would get wind of where the fruit pickers were camping and midnight convoys would be formed as they had to migrate to a new location. Alicia loved the cat and mouse games we were playing with the authorities and she said it made her feel like a "true Gypsy" for the first time in her life. Those fruit pickers really are Gypsies and nomads at heart, like carnival folk and rodeo clowns. In each new campsite we established with the fruit pickers water access and shade were the most essential requirements. As soon as a suitable location was found somewhere down by the river tarps were stretched between the trees to shelter the vehicles from the blistering river land sun. When the worst heat of the day had passed Alicia and I would often take the dinghy out to explore the area and search for fossils in the looming sandstone cliffs.

Rufus was a fearless little nipper from the word go and he soon learned how to stand on the point of the bow in true mascot fashion. On one of our fossil hunting expeditions I found the complete inside of a nautilus shell that had existed in some long dead ocean. Fossils of plants were common and Alicia dug out a time blackened tooth that might have belonged to a pre-historic shark. The spot where I decided to attempt my crop was a few miles up the river from Renmark in a billabong which was bordered by large hanging willows.

Our newly germinated seeds turned into delicate upward moving sprouts in the southern sun and as they did we had to rough it in the wilds more than at any other stage of the journey. When the seedlings were about three inches high we moved them out of the shade cloth mini nursery into new containers. These were foam broccoli boxes that we had gathered from various shopping centres in the area and they were filled with a blend of the local riverland soil and potting mix. Each seedling was sheltered from insects and the like by a wire cage which supported a shaded cloth cover. There were twenty containers in all and each held a sturdy survivor from the germination of more than a hundred seeds. The seedlings were placed in the most sunny locations we could find in the reeds between the hanging willows and the soil filled containers floated perfectly, just as we hoped they would. Each plant occupied box was fastened to a log or a root at the waters edge and the white polystyrene was disguised by dead branches and leaves.

Any boating enthusiast who entered the lagoon would have to get through a propeller busting maze of submerged logs and other snags to detect our floating crop and they would have to be anchored less than a foot from each plant to work out what it was. Once our babies were secured in their new homes I did a test run to see how my watering system was going to work. Alicia stood knee deep by each container to watch the result as I motored by at half throttle. The bow waves that I created as I passed, gently ended their journey towards the river bank in little splashes, which spilled just a few drops into the waiting containers of soil. The system worked so well that the plants didn't even topple over when speedboats and paddle steamers made their way past the entrance of the lagoon. With the seedlings growing merrily away in their self watering habitats Alicia and I had all but completed our pot growing mission. Now all there was to do was wait for the plants to mature and hope that no inquisitive river users stumbled upon them. We moved to a new campsite on the other side of Renmark and I got back to work on my art. As well as further developing the script I started cataloguing all of my four track recordings into some kind of comprehensive order. This meant long hours in headphones playing and replaying studio dubs trying to find the closest generation to the master. When I was busy with my work Alicia used to occupy herself with long bush walks around the river land in search of fossils and bones. Rufus was her constant guard and companion as they explored the drought stricken flood plain in search of natural wonders. She would often drag me away from my work to see something she had just discovered. We shared a healthy fascination for all that existed in our red dirt, mallee scrub domain.

Rufus had grown into a solidly built three month old river dog and he got his first real taste of hunting action when a large goanna broke it's camouflage and ran up a nearby tree. My young hound was so quick off the mark that he was able to snap at the creatures hind quarters as it scrambled up the trunk. The lizard broke free of his jaws and made it up to the crown fork with a trail of blood marking it's accent.

Rufus barked and bounced around the tree for ages expecting his prey to come back down, but it just looked down at him wounded, but happy I would imagine to still be breathing. The goanna left the tree sometime in the night and early the next morning Rufus followed his scent to the base of a distant, long dead gumtree. The corpse was covered in ants and flies but the air born scavengers had not as yet arrived. Part of the lizards intestines were protruding from a gash that was inflicted in it's underbelly. My young pal had grabbed him so firmly that one of the back legs was broken and the white of a bone was showing through. Rufus was so excited that he snapped wildly at the carcass as I held it up by the tail. A quick dunk in the water scattered the swarming ants and flies then I threw it over my shoulder just like a bonified, dog running aboriginal hunter who was going home with a kill.

I fired up the smouldering embers of the fire and removed the animals insides. Then I threw it onto the rising flames with the skin still on, the same way the natives have done for countless generations. Each time I turned the lizard over Rufus gave another barking and bouncing performance and while it cooked away he crouched with his chin on his front paws, drooling. I removed the best cuts of meat from the blackened, smoky carcass, then threw the smouldering remains into the shallows. Rufus dragged the steaming skeleton out of the water and he made short work of it once it had cooled down. That evening Alicia and I dined on goanna portions cooked in a white wine sauce with garlic and green peppercorns. We washed it down with some high quality but inexpensive burgundy that we had picked up from the local cellars, ...

HERE'S TO OUR DOG RUFUS!

Being the natural show pony I am I've always had the problem of women feeling that they were living in my shadow and with Alicia the same old curse began to rear it's ugly head. When we were living on the houseboat it was accepted in an unspoken kind of way that I was the Captain of the vessel and to balance things out Alicia took on the role of Supreme Commander when it came to anything to do with the Land rover. With each passing day it started to go a little bit further past a joke and in the end I had to tell her to stop ordering me around. I was more than capable of changing an oil filter or a spark plug without her constant interference, but she persisted in using the car maintenance thing as a platform for other underlining gripes. The pot she had bought for the trip started raising the levels on the tension meter as well and I was regularly scolded for smoking too much. At the first opportunity I sold what remained of the pound to the fruit pickers and from then on I fuelled my daily habit from other sources. The battle of wills that was emerging between us became unbearable and one stinking hot day we had and all out screaming battle on the shores of Lake Bonney in the township of Barmera. In the heat of the moment we agreed to go our separate ways and I set about unloading my gear out of her precious frigging bomb of a car.

When we attempted to debate who should take the dog the screaming resumed to even greater heights, until I just picked up Rufus in my arms and said goodbye, sounding more like an angry father than a jilted lover. Alicia drove off towing the caravan in a billowing plume of red dust and I was left standing amid piles of hastily scattered belongings. In those final moments of our unfriendly separation the impact of my middle aged, romantic fling hit home and it impacted with the soul crushing weight of a million half ripe, river land plums. I knew the girl was too young from the word go but it seems that Mr happy down in my pants had other idea's.

I sat on a log in the carpark where I had been abandoned and just play wrestled with the dog for a while, as I puffed on a scoob and pondered my next move. As chance would have it the first potential storage area I spotted was an old weather beaten, tin garden shed which sat at the rear of the local scout hall, about sixty feet from where I was sitting. Some sort of event was taking place in the hall and the arriving scouts were being greeted by officials at the door. I wandered over to the scout hall and said a friendly "Hello" to a bloke who looked like the most senior looking Scoutmaster among them. Early in the conversation I made mention of my uncle Ainslie was a much loved scoutmaster and who's fine reputation they all would have known. I endeavoured to explain my predicament to the door posted officials and enquired about the use of the old tin shed out the back. When I mentioned that my girlfriend and I had parted company and I was left stranded they all had a healthy chuckle and said, "Yea!, we heard the whole thing". The Senior Official said that I could use the shed for a week if I fixed up the wind battered door and left the place as I had found it. In humbled gratitude I agreed to the request and left a twenty dollar donation in the scout troupes fund raising tin. In the following hours my golf buggy was used to cart gear from the dusty carpark to the shed. By sundown my belongings were all safely locked away and I was setting up camp in a circle of spindly salt bush at the waters edge. Rufus sensed that an important change had taken place and he moped by the fireside as I polished off a bottle of wild Turkey. I took comfort from Leonard Cohen in the loveless delirium of a humid night and vowed to pursue the affections of females closer to my own age in future.

With the dawn my canine buddy and I rose to the sight of pelicans wading in the reeds less than ten feet from my bedroll. Rufous sprung into action and chased the intruders from our midst with not an inkling of the previous days dramas. I allowed myself to tune into his happy doggies mood and before long I was rationalising how doomed my relationship with Alicia had been before it even got started. Our affair I reasoned was nothing more than a stupid fling that I was clutching to in my pathetic middle aged, sexual decline. I had been some kind of Tarzan or Jungle Jim fantasy figure in her great outdoors adventure and when our true identities emerged, the illusion died like a mud bogged carp in a dried out lagoon. Rufus and I left the campsite after breakfast and wandered into the small township of Barmera. I loaded the golf buggy up with fuel and supplies while we were there and one of the local aboriginals supplied me with some filthy red dirt marijuana. As the dog and I were walking back down to the river past the Barmera sailing club I spotted a couple of fibreglass catamaran pontoons leaning against a side wall. A sign was attached to the old floats giving their sale price and there was a number attached that I could call. I got straight on the phone to the owner of the pontoons and after lunch he drove down to the river to meet me. I ended up paying the old bloke sixty dollars for the pontoons and he threw in a length of rope so I could drag them through the water to my camp.

The pontoons had metal bolt plates moulded into the upper surfaces which were rusted with time, but still promised to support a timber frame. On one of my little walks around the neighbourhood I discovered that they were demolishing the old folks home just across from the recreation park where I was camped. I used the buggy by moonlight to gather a supply of the discarded hardwood planks and the next day I started work on the frame. I spent the next week or so designing and constructing a dual hulled, cabin mounted vessel that was intended to carry my doggy and I out of lake Bonney and onto the Lower River Murray. The catamaran pontoons were joined by a sturdy timber bolted frame and I made a floor out of apricot crates I gathered from the rear of the local grocery store. On top of the splintery, flooring slats I erected a wind facing triangular cabin frame using two inch PVC piping and plastic moulded joints. The frame was sealed with my usual method of placing tarps over shade cloth and by the time I was finished it was like being inside of a sturdy, floating tent. The outboard motor was mounted on an extra thick hardwood transom that I fitted into the flooring frame and this allowed me to control the throttle from an insect protected position in the cabin. The days were dry and still as I put my new watercraft together but the wind came up in the final stages of construction and it blew hard for six days. It was white capping out on the water the whole time and I just had to sit it out with my dog under the upturned dingy. There was too much sand blowing to risk switching on the laptop so I just read some Wilbur Smith novels and drank like a marooned sailor. My camp was right next to some waterfront acreage that was being landscaped and decorated with sculptures by the local kids in a council funded scheme. They were a cool young crew of creative but wayward teenagers who would often pop in to say "hi!" and have a smoke by the campfire.



YOUNG RUFUS ON THE RAFT

The wind eventually eased back to a mild flatland breeze so I packed up my load and set out across Lake Bonney. The dingy was towed along behind the vessel and it served as a storage area for the least used of my belongings. I had more than enough fuel stored inside it so Rufus and I did a slow circle of the lake before passing under the high road bridge and entering the backwaters of the Murray floodplain. The previous day while I was in Barmera buying supplies I came in contact with the local Kayak instructor and he described the route I should follow out of the lake. He told me how to get to the main arm of the river but the situation in which we met was a somewhat drunk and stoned singalong with the local Aborigines. I was so confident I had the directions in my head I didn't even bother to mark a course on the map. At the time we were conversing the Coories were belting out a passion filled version of 'The Witchita Lineman' and all I really wanted to do was sing along with them. The impact of my poor travel preparations came thundering home two days after I set out when I discovered that my vessel was badly bogged in the blistering sun. I had not yet completed a journey that should only have taken half a day and there I was going nowhere. I managed to get the raft free of the bog after hours of levering it with a branch and once it was settled in deeper water all I could do was collapse with exhaustion. A severe case of delirium had set in and I was too fucked out to contemplate motoring off, so I just flopped out and drank myself to sleep with a Berrie Estates wine cask. The next morning I woke up sore, hungover and extremely irritable at having stuffed up the directions. My back was hurting too much to even think about manoeuvring through unfamiliar territory so I decided to cast my handlines in the shade of a willow and let the day pass by without me. The midday sun was directly overhead and I was gutting a big fat carp when I heard what sounded like a kid laughing off in the distance. A short time later I spotted a group of Kayaks passing in front of a reedy inlet about a hundred feet away and I started shouting for them to come over to where I was moored. As luck would have it the group of kayakers were being escorted through the shallow, backwater delta by the canoe instructor I had met at the singalong. After he and the kids had a good chuckle at my predicament a map was produced and the exact location of the swampland exit was conveyed. The inlet I was supposed to enter was the one I had seen the kayak enthusiasts passing in front of but it looked so much like all of the others I had no way of knowing in my sun struck and delirious state. The kayakers rowed off, still giggling and I tapped into a new source of enthusiasm as I prepared to leave the boggy lagoon. Once motoring I was able to negotiate the narrow channel that led out of the swamp but I still had to putt along between endless reed banks, keeping an eye open for the main arm of river.

A flock of swallows followed my trail and hovered inquisitively outside of the shade cloth just inches from my face. Rufus wasn't long to spot them and even though he barked madly they still hung around diving and swooping in fantastic aerial displays. Our free entertainment from the natural kingdom was interrupted when the upper deck of a houseboat came into view from behind a tall cluster of reeds. This assured me that I had located the main body of water and I had a private chuckle at my own stupidity in getting lost. We made it to the Overland Corner settlement on the third day after setting out and we were greeted on our arrival by some fruit pickers who were camping high on the gum rooted banks. I knew some of them from previous campsites I had stayed at with Alicia and they sang broken hearted laments when they found out that my young sort had run home to mummy. We yodelled drunken, sad, folk songs by firelight and Rufus got his first taste of hard core dog fighting with their mangy, river dwelling mutts.

After three days of partying with the fruit pickers I decided to move on down the river towards Blanchetown which was my much anticipated destination. I passed through a number of locks and weirs as I moved between charming riverside, shack towns and at each I had to give the Lockmaster the name of my vessel. The best name I could come up with was 'The Starlight Express' but it didn't receive the slightest response from any of those country bumpkin, waterways officials. I guess those blokes have seen it all in their time. I did however receive a positive reaction to my cabin mounted cat when I pulled into the township of Waikerie. There was a young reporter from the local gazette waiting on the neatly trimmed grass as I dropped anchor. Apparently someone down river had alerted the newspaper that a raft bearing a 'Greenie' flag was heading their way. The theme of my interview was naturally environmental and I focussed on rising salt levels and the misappropriation of water as the prime concern for the river land communities. The article appeared in the local rag two days later and it featured a striking picture of Rufus and I standing on the pontoons looking up at the flag. I bought a little glass picture frame at the local Saint Vincent's store and hung the newspaper clipping up in the cabin. That event lifted my spirits immensely and it reinforced my pledge to pursue the higher calling instead of unsustainable, time wasting affairs with the opposite sex. I got more work done on the laptop as I putted along between those river land townships than I had at any stage since I first started writing. After I had located a mooring in each new town the first thing I would do was find a compatible computer and download text from a disk to hard copy. The script was almost two thirds complete and my river land adventure inspired the story to epic new heights.

I was treated to a diverse range of environmental perspective's by a host of authentic, down home characters and this gave the unfolding tale a true grass roots feel. My arrival in the township of Morgan was the most memorable of my mooring tales because it's closely associated to a special dream. In the dream I was swimming with Rufus in the green waters of the Murray and we were suddenly swept into a raging torrent that dragged us towards cascading falls. I clutched desperately at some gigantic marijuana plants that were floating all around us and somewhere between the topmost point of the falls and the rocks below I snapped out of the dream. I had fallen asleep exhausted after a stinking hot run between towns and my vessel was moored where the River Princess paddle steamer is generally tied up. The sound of fifty million angels trumpets filled my ears and I woke to the vision of an enormous revolving paddle wheel and fairy lights on a polished, colonial gangway. The passengers were hanging over the railings getting pissed and laughing their heads off as I frantically pulled up anchor and moved to an unoccupied wharf. The reason the dream was so significant is because it was almost a psychic premonition of things to come.

When the harvest season arrived I started going out of my head wondering if my long neglected, floating marijuana crop had survived. I made arrangements to leave Rufus with some fellow dog lovers who ran horses on the edge of town and he was secured with food and water in a disused bird aviary. I was on a bus bound for Renmark within the hour so I could get out to the lagoon and satisfy my curiosity once and for all. From the bus depot I hitched a ride out to our old camping site track then I walked about four miles to a clearing across from the lagoon. The first half of my river crossing went fine but after a while I started developing a nagging cramp in my left leg. The current was strongest right where it hit and it took all of the strength I could muster to get to the other side.

I was sure that I was going to sink and die but my dog paddling strategy eventually paid off when the first handfuls of mud squooshed between my fingers. I layed in the shallows for about half an hour just regaining my breath and thanking my lucky stars that I was still around. In the moments where my physical strength had started to abandon me I was on the edge of panic and it felt like I was back inside the dream I'd had. After a sufficient rest on the muddy bank I picked myself up dog weary and started looking for the crop. Much to my dismay I discovered that only one plant out of the whole twenty had survived and the pitiful cluster of heads I harvested was less than would fill a matchbox. I placed the under matured buds in the snap seal bag I had brought along as I contemplated the most practical way to get back to the other side without swimming. A short walk along the bank revealed a moored houseboat with a dingy tied up at the rear.

The middle aged couple who owned it gave their teenage son the job of ferrying me across to the other side and I waved the good folk farewell amid warnings about those treacherous currents on the bends. The young bloke dropped me off where I had left my jeans and a half consumed bottle of Coopers ale and he waved me a cheery goodbye. The beer I had left sitting there had become warm enough to cook an egg in but my newfound gratitude for existence made it taste sweeter than the nectar of life itself. As I moistened my lips on the warm beer I made an inner pledge to put an end to all life threatening delinquent stunts that might see me perished and forgotten in some unholy backwater cesspool.

Rufus coped well with the overnight incarceration and his doggy sitters said he was no trouble to them at all. Our dog and master bond increased noticeably after the separation and from then on his canine intelligence increased by the day. We arrived in Blanchetown at the peak of the silly season with Christmas just a little over a week away. I moored the Starlight express out the front of my uncle Ainslie's shack and tied up at the submerged log that I had jumped off and had my first near death experience as a kid. My journey down the River Murray had come to an official end with my arrival at that old log and it was here that the passing of time hit home with a sobering impact. Since last I was in Blanchetown the log had been covered by a small metal and timber jetty which had rusted and buckled to the elements in the time that had passed. All that remained was the crumpled frame and a couple of splintery boards.

'Time, ... THE ENEMY OF ALL WHO WALK THE EARTH THROUGH THE AGES'

My childhood, holiday shanty town was much the same as I had last seen it except for the fast food joint on the corner and the new bottle barn that was attached to the back of the pub. That hotel sits fondly in my memories as it was the place where I celebrated my first steps without the aid of crutches. I was driving the backup vehicle on one of the Owen farm boys trailbike runs and I skidded into a large mound of fine red sand. My crutches were of no use in the pile of fine dust and with the encouragement of my mates I managed to hobble out of the car to firm ground. I got blind stinking drunk to celebrate my accomplishment and the lads had to carry me out of the pub to sleep it off under a gum tree. Some of the locals I met in the front bar this time around knew my uncle and auntie before they sold their shack. They were a friendly bunch of beer swilling punters who made me feel welcomed every time I walked in the door.

I got speaking to a couple of blokes at the bar one afternoon who were opal miners and they said they knew my old man when he lived in Andamooka. Stories came out about what a wild spirited bastard he was in his prime and that's how the conversation swung around to my trip down the river. The publican along with most of the other people at the bar were in on our boisterous, beer swilling chatter and when the barman heard that I needed a lift to Adelaide he was quick to propose a plan. It seemed that one of his employee's was driving down to Adelaide in two days time with an empty truck to pick up the Christmas booze. The publican said if I helped his driver pack the beer at the other end I would be able to catch a ride with all my gear and the boat. Bang!, What a fantastic stroke of luck and the timing was immaculate. The driver who I had already met in the poolroom was a fellow jester, who bore the name of Bagsy. Over a friendly pint of ale we reached an agreement that he would pick me and my gear up near the boat ramp at sunrise in two mornings hence and before we left I had to give him forty bucks to help with the fuel. He said he could drop me off at West Beach later in the evening after I had helped him to load up the grog and that I replied was an offer I did not intend to refuse. I plonked my empty beer glass down on the bar and wished the Blanchetown crew a good evening, then I stumbled back to my camp with Rufus bouncing along beside. The next day was spent dismantling the cabin area of my trusty flatwater vessel and sorting out what I would need for the trip. I decided to leave the timber joined pontoons as a swimming platform for the local kids so they might remember me with good feeling when I was gone. Bagsy pulled up in the dawn light of the second morning. I had managed to reduce my load to the absolute bare essentials and the council dumpster near the boat ramp was filled to the lids with unwanted stuff. We loaded the boat into the rear of the old Bedford truck and it was strapped upright with my other gear between it and the tin wall. After the long hot drive we had to wait in line at the West End brewery while other loads were despatched.

By seven o'clock in the evening we had all of the Christmas booze stacked neatly around the dingy and we were making our way out to West Beach amid drink driving holiday revellers and wheel spinning hoons. Bagsy gladly accepted the extra twenty bucks I threw in and we wished each other a merry Christmas as he putted off back to Blanchetown.

Life passes by ... like the view out on the freeway

the past has been and gone, ... and the future starts today'

CHAPTER FOUR

NOT ALL THERE!

As I have been slowly scrolling through the original first draft chapters I have on occasion been struck with the gut wrenching thought that large sections of important text are missing from the overall story. I'm hoping to Christ that I began working off the right master file from the many different copies I have saved through the years. In the introduction to the last chapter I had to include a couple of key points as they weren't in the version of the draft I was editing. Being more than twenty new chapters in it's way too late to turn back now so I'll just have to keep plodding along and I'll fill in any glaring gaps in the present day intros. When I have completed a publishable final draft of my memoirs I'll double back on all of the old computer files I've got and I may be able to retrieve the lost pages from a host of countless ancient saves. I've just done a quick browse through the upcoming pages in the next chapter and everything seems as it should be, for the time being at least. If you happen to spot anything that may need my attention just have your answering machine phone my answering machine and we'll do de'cafes.

THAT'S TECHNO FERAL WITH A CAPITAL 'T' SON

After Bagsy and his truck had vanished in a puff of blue smoke up West Beach road I dragged the dingy into some low, bush dotted dunes near the sailing club boatramp. There were a group of dodgy looking characters hanging around in the carpark area so I left Rufus guarding the rest of my stuff while I did trips back and forth with the buggy. Once everything was safely stashed among the dunes we camped under the oar propped dingy and were sheltered from the evening breeze by sand dunes on all sides. I got a small fire going and smoked the last of my riverland weed as I indulged in a sense of personal satisfaction and reflected on how well things had gone thus far. The successful transportation of my fully loaded boat, the dog and myself over the distance we had covered was quite an accomplishment and it made the challenge to overcome any future ordeals less daunting. Now my mission was to come up with some way of getting us out of the southern states and back to my houseboat on the Brunswick River.

The following morning the sea was flat and calm as I loaded up the tinny and eased it into the shallow waters of Adelaide's southern beaches. I used to play on these beaches as a kid and from my memory of the area I figured my best chance of finding a sheltered campsite was on the Pattawillunga inlet, so I putted out past a group of early morning swimmers and made my way out towards Glenelg.

A pod of dolphins came right in close to the dingy as we moved along and Rufus barked madly at them from the bow as they splashed and dived for schools of mullet. He jumped in and swam after the dolphins but he eventually gave up and paddled back to the boat. My bedroll was saturated when he climbed back on board and he spent the remainder of our trip scanning the water for other submerged creatures. Once in the Pattawillunga inlet I found a well concealed campsite under a large willow near the golf club. It was perfectly sheltered from the glaring summer sun and it hid the boat so well that none of the passing rowers or joggers even knew we were there. The coast was buzzing with holiday boating enthusiasts which meant increased waterway patrols so I decided to stay put on the inlet until after Christmas. The dingy was overloaded to the max and the last thing I needed was an encounter with any over zealous waterways officials. Rufus and I spent christmas day hopping into a food hamper that I picked up from a charity store in town. With maps spread out on the picnic blanket and all of the party aids a homeward bound drifter could need I set about plotting a course for where next my journey would lead. It would have been nice to have done a trip to Moana and ochre cove but it was out of my fuel range so I decided on a trek up the Port River instead. Port Adelaide is the town of my birth after all and I never got to explore the place as a kid let alone as an adult. The festive season passed as it does amid hangover blurred memories of disco lights and unfruitful flirtatious encounters. The morning after boxing day I departed the Pattawillunga inlet bound for Outer Harbour which sits at the mouth of the Port River. I spotted a number of waterways patrols long before they saw me and I avoided their scrutiny with a series of clever diversions. My boat was sitting pretty low in the water and it was easy enough to hide behind other, larger vessels as they moved towards the port. On my entry into the Port River I had to do a wide circle back into the open ocean as a massive cargo container was tugged through the mouth on it's way to a waiting dock. The bow wave of the gigantic ship would have been big enough to turn my little boat over so it looked like a more sane option to wait until it was well clear of the wave splashed rock walls. After an undetected passage up the river I passed under a road bridge which marks the entrance to the Port harbour. My first priority was to find somewhere to stash my gear so I could lighten up the boat and avoid the unwanted attention of the law.



ENTERING THE MOUTH OF THE PORT RIVER

To get my vessel away from the central harbor area I took the first available turn I came to and it happened to be the mooring area of the Port Adelaide Yacht Club. I was hoping there might be some disused spot around the place where I could stash my gear and possibly set up camp but it proved useless and I had to double back. The late afternoon sun was inching ever closer to the ranges in the distance so I pulled over to a mooring platform at the yacht club and tied up next to a sleek, deep water cruiser. There appeared to be some kind of function taking place up in the clubhouse and I heard music filtering down across the water. Disco lights were flashing through the large plate glass windows and I could see people sipping cocktail glasses on a balcony overlooking the harbor. I had just fastened the rope to a bollard when I was suddenly confronted by a voice which was similar to that of Thursten Howel on Gilligans Island. In the fading hues of twilight some intoxicated individual had inquired, "And what exactly do you think you are doing young man?" The voice belonged to a safari suited elderly gentleman who was sipping on a cocktail and performing a rather shaky decent of the mooring gangplank. As quick as a flash I replied that I had just arrived in the harbour from open water and I was hoping to secure a mooring for the night. The old piss tank was all puffed up with newly assigned responsibility and he said, "Well you had better follow me young sir and I will see what we can do". We walked up the gangplank towards the partying clubhouse and I smiled a secret smile as this tantalising new scenario unfolded. Also at the fact I had adopted a mode of thrift shop attire for my grand homeport arrival which suggested I may have just stepped off of a luxury vessel myself. Once through the open doors of the clubhouse the old boy left me and walked off to speak with another fellow who looked like he might be in charge. The two men came over to where I was standing by a large, well stocked bar and the other bloke introduced himself as the Commodore of the club. He said that a mooring for the night would be "no problem at all" and I was promptly invited to join their party. I sipped a cocktail with those most courteous and accommodating old salts and I told them a little of my adventures before the Commodore had to toddle off to the stage and make an announcement. Apparently two of the club's veteran members were leaving on a world sailing trip and the party was to bid them an official farewell before they embarked on the journey. The elderly couple were welcomed onto the small stage amid hearty applause from their peers and a plaque was presented in honour of their life's dedication to the club. The party goers were all as friendly and welcoming as the Commodore and his old mate had been and I started to wonder if somewhere on my Port River excursion I might have made a wrong turn into the 'Twilight Zone'. At the first opportunity after the presentation I popped down the walkway to the boat and gave my trusty, tail wagging doggy boy a plate of chicken scraps and some water. After he had finished dining I putted the dingy in next to a small ramp and tied up to a mussel covered post.

With my belongings safely guarded and out of the way of any passing boats I returned to the party just as the traditional waltz of honour was being performed. Glasses were being filled for toast upon toast as the party gathered steam and the merriment excelled into the star speckled Port Adelaide night. Even though we all had the sea faring thing in common I still felt a little out of place in the company of such immense wealth. The row of boats out the front must have been worth about a squillion bucks and the carpark was filled with expensive imported saloons of every imaginable kind. The Commodore kept popping over to see if I was ok and a waiter was instructed with a chuckle of good humoured authority that my glass was not to be seen empty. Jesus! all I needed was a safe spot to moor my boat for the night and I was being treated like some long lost son of the sea faring clan who had returned from being shipwrecked on a desert island. My situation started to make a little sense when the Commodore took the microphone in the closing stages of the party. He went into his usual mode of ceremonial banter as he described the time honoured traditions of the Port Adelaide Sailing Club. At the end of his drawn out delivery he mentioned a law of the club which concerned the support of travellers in need. My ears pricked up much the same as my dogs would if a potential meal broke a twig in the bush. Apparently it was a long preserved tradition of the club that when any of it's members leave for high water the first new arrival is granted, 'The Rights of The Travelling Seaman'.

'That's me... Bingo!'

I was formally welcomed onto the stage by the Commodore amid great applause as the waiting DJ filled the airwaves with 'Sailing' by Rod Stewart. The old couple, myself and the Club Commodore shared the mike in a semi-pissed harmony rendition and the crowd laughed so much that the dance floor became slippery with spilt cocktails, whisky and beer. Rufus must have recognised my voice as I went for the high notes and I distinctly heard him over the music howling at the moon. After the festivities had concluded for the evening a junior club member led me to a boatshed just near the ramp where the tinny was tied up. The wooden doors of the boatshed were unlocked and I was told that I could use it until the start of the new year when work resumed at the club. I thanked my escort and wished him a pleasant evening, then I layed my bedroll out among rack mounted dingys, oars, ropes and anchors. 'The Rights of a Travelling Seaman' echoed through my mind as I dozed off and the sound of Rufus feeding on lobster portions and Peking duck was the last thing I heard as I smiled myself to sleep.

'I AM SAILING ... I AM SAILING ...

HOME AGAIN ... HOME AGAIN'

The sailing club served as a perfect base to work from because I had the use of shower facilities, a well stocked kitchen and I even had a key for the payphone up the hall. We camped in the boatshed for the duration of the silly season and I explored the rivers best fishing spots as I got to know some of the locals in the town of my birth. Even after I had moved on the sailing club committee allowed me to store some of my gear in a corner of the boatshed which meant the dingy was no longer overweight and headed for a bust. Once the weight problem was overcome the waterways police couldn't touch me as you didn't need a licence with a five horsepower outboard back then and everything else was pretty well ship shape. I was given a true ocean drifters farewell by the Commodore before I departed and I thanked him for teaching me the value of well established seafaring traditions. He said if I ever took up deep water sailing I could apply for membership at the club and we chuckled as I told him that a lottery win might very well make it happen. My arrival in Port Adelaide was the best hometown welcome that any Gypsy of the waterways could wish for and it reinforced the notion that my adventures were blessed with good fortune. The word magical seemed inadequate to describe the recurring coincidence and the strokes of good luck I was receiving were so well timed that it was almost scary. I guess a charmed existence is a matter of personal perception and you don't stand a chance of living the so called 'Good life' if you can't see the opportunities that circumstance sends your way.

When the new years eve fireworks exploded over the southern beaches Rufus and I were camping out on a little mangrove island, among fast moving backwater channels. No party we could have sniffed out would have been able to compare to my grand entry to the port and I was more than content just hanging out with my dog and casting pilchard baited lines. The final starbursts from the fireworks faded in the distance and it was strange not to hear the familiar whistles and bangs. I guess those moments of peaceful solitude are the reward that only comes to lone travellers and it magnified the fact I was living so far outside of the normal flow of civilisation.

The silence of the evening was suddenly interrupted by a bouncing spool in the boat and I landed a big fat bream which was grilled to perfection over the wind blown coals of the fire. As I choofed on a scoob and downed the last of my overproof rum I became increasingly excited by the knowledge I was in the territory of my earthly beginnings. The fact I was so close to the place of my worldly origins seemed to hold a special meaning in an organic kind of way. Then from out of nowhere I was struck by the idea to look up my old man while I was in the area. Our first meeting had been an absolute disaster due to the hair triggered impulses of youth and I was curious to find out how we would inter-react a few years down the track. When next I went into the port for supplies I stopped at a public phone and browsed through the book looking for names that were listed with a J. My Hungarian family name is Jasko and I was curious to see who of my relatives still lived around the port.

The only listing under Jasko bore the initial S which I imagined might be my cousin Suzie. She was the adopted daughter of my father's younger brother Johnny and I hadn't seen her in more than a decade and a half. When the phone was picked up it was indeed Suzie and she greeted me with absolute surprise after so long without speaking. She agreed to tell my father that I had phoned and we arranged to get in touch with each other in a couple of days time. When next we spoke she said that he didn't want to know about any uncomfortable reunions with a son who had once threatened his life. It took all of my powers of persuasion but she finally agreed to receive a letter on his behalf. I pulled the computer out of storage in the boatshed and drafted a realistic account of my reasons for wanting to get in touch. I explained that I was a confused adolescent when first we met and my actions were driven by the mixed up thoughts of an angry young man. I guess the old bloke must have liked the part in the letter where I called my mother a mind poisoning, old bitch because he left his home number with Suzie to be passed on to me. I called the number immediately and the phone was answered by the Hungarian woman he should have married before he ever got tangled up with my mother. When he came to the phone his tone was cautious and reserved but after the initial exchange of greetings he settled into a more relaxed mode. I told him that I would really like to see him in person while I was in town and a meeting was planned for the following day in a cafe near the Black Diamond corner. He pulled up at the kerb about half an hour later than we had arranged and I recognised him straight away from the time we met before. I jumped in the passenger seat of his late model Mercedes coupe and we entered the flow of traffic out of the central port area. We engaged in all manner of smalltalk as we drove along and he eventually brought the car to a stop in one of the older neighbourhoods that sits behind giant oil containers near the docks. He pointed at one of the run down little dwellings on the street and told me it was sitting on the land where I had lived immediately after I was born.

I was fascinated by his commentary of my birth and origins but more so I was staggered by the knowledge that the street we were in was just around the corner from the public phone box where I had first called Suzie. My father and I spent about three hours together driving around the port and looking at places that featured in his early migrant days. He showed me where he and his brothers used to drop dynamite in the river to catch the buckets of fish that sustained us as children. When the conversation came around to angling everything clicked into place and awkward father and son discomforts were replaced by tales of great catches, with the occasional hearty laugh. The old man dropped me off at my new campsite which was a little sandy beach in front the local Scout hall. When he saw how I was living he said that I had inherited his adventurous spirit and we parted with a friendly handshake before he drove away.

I felt a new peace in my heart knowing that I had healed old wounds and it occurred to me that at some subconscious level our meeting was probably the main reason for my return to South Australia. A few days after the meeting with my father I was casting lines in front of the Girl Guides hall when I was joined by an interesting couple who set up easychairs beside me. They instantly fell in love with Rufus and their names were Pauline and Graham. The couple lived just up the road in a suburb called Osborne. Pauline was a fat and happy Aboriginal woman and her partner Graham was a white bloke who looked a lot like the hippies I knew in Nimbin and Byron Bay. It was easy to share tales of my adventure with the couple and before I had finished telling my story they offered to let me stay at their house. Fuck Yes! you wonderful people! The magic was still happening in a big way and everything pointed towards success in the quest for my Northern Rivers home.

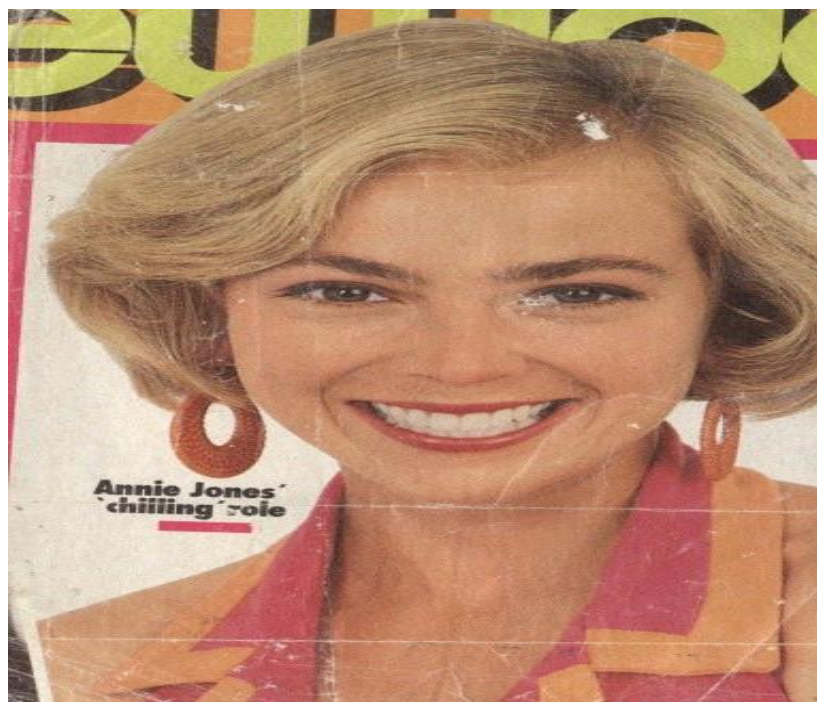


ROUGH AND READY ACCOMMODATION IN THE TOWN OF MY BIRTH

My new camp turned out to be a stinking hot tin shed at the end of a concrete driveway but I loved it to pieces because it sat within an enclosed yard with a high wooden fence for my dog. Graham and I loaded the dingy onto the roof racks of his little Datsun and it took a second trip to pick up the rest of my gear. The following day he drove me over to the sailing club for the remainder of my stuff and by the end of the day I was comfortably settled with all of my belongings in one place. The next most logical thing I could do was acquire a registered trailer into which I could load my stuff and plan for the journey North. With a scan of the local Trading Post I spotted a secondhand motorbike trailer that was registered for two more months and it was going at the achievable price of a hundred and fifty bucks. I had no rent to pay or other pressing debts so I used the bulk of my next pension cheque to buy it. I lived on fish and baked beans for the following two weeks but with each new day I grew closer to the point of departure. Graham and I picked up the trailer and towed it back to Osborne where I set about making a four foot high frame constructed from PVC offcuts.

When the frame was glued at the corners and tarped over it held all I owned and the boat was strapped squarely on the topmost adjoining pipes. Graham and I were the only white inhabitants in what was basically an Aboriginal household. The goings on around the place were as authentically indigenous as you might find in any remote Coorie settlement and we were often confided in with regards to ancient tribal wisdom's. Pauline and I hit it off in a big way and I found her to be one of the few people I could truly be myself with. Not long after I moved into the shed a visitor to the house nicked a block of hash out of my digs and Pauline turned the place upside down until she disclosed the culprit. A pow wow was convened at the kitchen table and the offending party was required to return my hash and make an apology.

When Pauline picked up the details of my relationship with my father she made it her personal business to act as our family councillor. I told her about my half sister Annie Jones and it opened up a whole new vista of sacred family law that I never knew existed. Annie or Annika as is her Hungarian name was the young girl who was trying out her new skates the first time I met my father. I didn't find out until many years later that she was a Logie winning movie and television star. The first picture I ever saw of Annie was on a 'Neighbours' chewing gum packet and I guess that's about as worlds apart as family members can get. Pauline was little impressed that Annie was a celebrity, instead she focussed on the fact I had called her my "half sister".



MY SISTER ANNIE. A GENETICALLY DETERMINED BRUSH WITH FAME

In the Aboriginal culture there is no such thing as half anything and as penance for my indiscretion I was ordered to call my father and arrange another meeting before I left South Australia. I called him that very day as Pauline waited by the phone to hear the result. He said he would love to see me again and big fat Pauline danced like an ecstatic hippopotamus who had swallowed a magic mushroom. When he arrived the next day I made Pauline come out the front and meet him. He was thrilled to make her acquaintance and they recalled Aboriginal family names he had spent time with in his opal mining days. Our drive was only a short one to the home of my uncle Biela and his lovely wife Jan. My father's wife came along as well and it turned into a full blown family reunion under grapevine laden trellises. I was treated to a chicken soup that was identical in every way to the dish I have always prepared and it was followed by authentic goulash the likes of which I may never taste again. We drank wine with the meal and the initial emotional reserves were replaced by loose tongued, passionate chatter. My father held the floor most of the time as he had a lifetime of stories to tell and the most intriguing one involved his escape from Hungary during the revolution. It was like something out of a Hollywood action thriller. The short version of the story is that two Russian soldiers asked to see his papers while he was walking to the shop and he couldn't produce them as they were just around the corner in his home. A group of his neighbours had been detained a little earlier and as quick as that they were unceremoniously shot before his eyes. The military commander said, "This is what happens to people who don't carry their papers with them". In a life threatened rush of quick thinking my father convinced the soldiers that he knew of a bombed out hotel where he could show them a cellar full of wine. He said he would guide them to the wine if they spared his life. Cautiously they agreed to his proposition and he led them to the underground wine cellar on the edge of town. After he had opened the doors to the cellar the soldiers looked into the darkened building but they couldn't see a thing. When they moved in closer lighting matches my father claims he pushed them both into the flooded cellar and blocked the doorway before they could get out. I was hearing this story from a man who I had once threatened to murder if he told me any lies so I figured it had to be true. The outcome of his bravery was so close to my own aspirations of courage that it sealed the final bond between us. Another fascinating story he told me involved the famous Hungarian, movie star sisters Eva and Zsa Zsa Gabor. Before the uprising in the homeland my father and his two brothers were sweet on all three Gabor sisters, but the young loves were never meant to be. The Gabor girls were Gypsies and my father's clan existed outside of their tribe. This story highlighted the most important question I had to ask the old man and when I did he displayed more fiery passion than I had yet witnessed. I said that I have always pursued a nomadic lifestyle and I asked him if I had any Gypsy ancestry. Instantly he exploded in a barrage of curses that I was well familiar with.

As well as picking up his recipe for chicken soup my mother also adopted many of the traditional curse words and I learned them from her. Once he had regained his breath and composure my father explained how the Gypsies are the lowest form of human garbage that have ever walked the earth. They live on the edge of civilised communities and thieve their way to prosperity on the backs of hard working people. He said that I was descended from pure Magyar citizens who are clean living people and the proudest race in the world.

Gee! ... Thanks Dad, ... Just asking'

The levity returned to our family gathering when my wise cracking uncle Biela interjected with, "So Istvan you say that you are an artist Eh?". All of the alarm bells started going off in my head at once and I replied with a hearty smile, "I am indeed uncle and I promote environmental sustainability through the audio visual media" My father and his scallywag brother looked at each other smiling and in unison shouted out loudly, "Bullshit Artist" to which we all had a good laugh as my fragile personal vanities were cast aside. All of a sudden the old man got serious again and pulled me aside for a private chat that the whole table could hear. He said if my mother had of given me to him as he had pleaded then I would have attended the best art schools in the country the same as my sister Annie. I was dumbstruck by this snippet of information and without knowing it my father had handed me the key to the unsolved cosmic joke that was my life's story. My creativity had grown out of cultural desolation and hardship with a blood jealous brother and a mother who thought I was completely weird. Annie's path was lined with riches and love which no doubt led her to the heights of acclaim she achieved. I had definitely received the raw end of the deal in most things, but I wouldn't even contemplate exchanging my noble environmental pursuits for acclaim in a B grade soap opera.

'Everybody's a dreamer, everybody's a star

and everybody's in movies,

it doesn't matter who you are'

'For those who are successful

be always on your guard

success walks hand in hand with failure

down Hollywood boulevard'

As we fingered through old photograph albums I came across a shot of the old boy holding up a fully matured dope plant that was dripping with ripened heads. I asked him about the picture and he told me that marijuana grows wild along railroad tracks in Hungary. He thought the shot might get a laugh from some of his mates at the golf club. He gave me the photograph as a token of our friendship and he also presented me with the watch he had worn since he arrived in Australia.



COOL SHOT PA

The gifts seemed like a most appropriate bonding ritual as we might never see each other again. For me the watch was the most significant present because time is the only thing keeping us from our graves. After a bout of sincere hugs and kisses I said farewell to my Hungarian relatives and my father drove me back to Osborne. We parted as friends and I waved him a final goodbye just a little more comfortable with my role as a man in the world. I planned my departure from Adelaide to coincide with the arrival my next pension payment and all going well I hoped to find some kind traveller in the backpacker district who would be willing to tow the trailer to Melbourne. With only three days to go till payday Rufus and I set off along the pubic bike track into the city on a pushbike I constructed from parts scattered around the shed. My converted golf buggy was fastened on just below the seat by a long, sturdy handle and the whole rig was so well balanced that Rufus and I could move along the bike track at top speed. My bedroll was strapped across the buggy with food and water underneath it in a milk crate. The ride was fantastic and on the way into the city I passed by many fondly remembered locations. Seeing the Glenelg tram wabbling along the track reminded me of carefree childhood days where a summertime trip to the beach was everything.

Once in the central city area I set up camp on the banks of the river Torrens among a cluster of bamboo that was away from the view of a bitumen walking track. The following morning I disconnected the bike from the buggy and Rufus was left tied up to guard our camp from intruders. I rode into the backpackers hostel area and started putting up notices which stated that I needed a lift to Melbourne. In them I mentioned that I would be back in the morning to deal with any replies. When I returned the next day there were no respondents waiting around for me but I got speaking to a couple of Israeli guys who were travelling North. They spoke very little English but we managed to communicate in spite of it. The guys were a bit hesitant when I acted out the towing of a trailer part but the sum of one hundred dollars put a much relieved lid on the deal. They were ready to go straight away and were only giving the board a final check in the hope of landing some passengers. My load and my bike were thrown into the back of their Holden station wagon among backpacks and food then we drove out to the River Torrens to my camp. By the time we had driven out to Osborne and hooked up the trailer it was about two in the afternoon but we set off regardless all as keen as each other to finally hit the road. My parting farewell with Pauline and Graham was teary and sorrowful and I even received a warm hug from the Coorie fellow who had nicked my block of hash. Because of the language barrier there was little room for conversation between myself and my fellow travellers. If ever there was a need to communicate it was only for things to do with the trailer and the toilet needs of Rufus. He threw up within the first ten minutes of leaving but the guys were very tolerant as I mopped up their food box with a beach towel. The box was replaced at the next stop and we all went into doggy watch patrol looking for any sign of bodily excretions.

About half way through the journey we pulled over for a rest beside a paddock full of ostriches and that was the most eventful thing that happened the whole trip. The long drive to Melbourne gave me heaps of time to catch up on the 'Once upon a Planet' script and time also to process the reconnection I had made with my father. Our time together was valuable as it had released me from a number of age old confusions, but with it the anger I had always felt for my mother was increased to new levels of simmering contempt. The picture he painted of her was that of a lazy, self pitying religious fanatic who ate chocolates all day and left the welfare of the kids to him. Too much of what he said rang true and I was left with the inevitable conclusion that I had been raised by the wrong bloody parent. I imagined how my life might have been if the old girl had of handed me over to my fathers care. He was a retired Hungarian Theatre Director who recognised and nurtured the talents of his offspring. A hard working and devoted father who might have provided the ideal platform for artistic greatness in the world.

My wishful imaginings were dissolved by the sight of the Melbourne skyline and within the hour I was free of the Israelis with my trailer chained up to a roadside sign. The hundred dollars we had agreed on was gladly handed over and I felt inspired by the knowledge that I had completed the second leg of my journey. This accomplishment signalled the fact I had become a fully bonified pioneer in the art of interstate hitch hiking with an abnormally large load. To catch a ride with a dog is one thing but to get away with a boat and fully loaded trailer was nothing short of miraculous. If the stars were still shining in my favour then some other understanding soul might allow me to hook up the trailer and haul me to Byron Bay. The trailer stayed chained to the inner city street sign for two days with Rufus crouched near the axle guarding it from any thieves. I did the rounds of the hostels putting up notices and every potential driver that I spoke to freaked out when they saw how much I had to take with me. The Melbourne winter rains had started to make outside camping unbearable and I was getting a little desperate at the lack of response I received. I was at the 'Friends of the Earth' shop checking the board and I bumped into an old mate called Stewart who had served with me on the frontline during the South East forest campaign. Stewart only needed to hear a few words before he went into action man mode and he fixed my predicament in a jiffy. We hooked the trailer up to his Toyota van and then towed it to the driveway of his rented Northcote home. I was given the use of a sun room near the back laundry which had been left unused for weeks by an overseas travelling flatmate. The house was occupied mostly by people from Northern New South Wales and it was easy to celebrate my Northbound progress in such a groovy setting. The girl who owned the sunroom wasn't due back for two more months and I was told by Stewart that I could sit out the winter in Melbourne if I wanted to. The offer was too good to refuse so I started paying rent for the room and dived back into my creative projects.

The trailer was pushed into the front yard of the house and gradually emptied of my gear. I leaned the boat up against the outside wall and it sat there for most of the winter. Rufus had an enclosed backyard to play around in and he grew more sturdy by the day on meat and bones from the Lebanese halal meat market on the High street. From a life of bouncing adventures on rivers and sun drenched beaches his day was reduced to walks in the park on the end of a tight leather strap. It drizzled and rained most of the time so I made him a shelter in the yard out of wooden planks and tarpaulin. He was allowed to come inside during the heaviest freezing downpours but only into the laundry where he snoozed in the relative warmth of the open the kitchen door.

My main focus as the endless, cold winter days passed was to bring the script to completion so I could get stuck into the recorded soundtrack and produce some kind of final product. I guess my thoughts must have been somewhere else as an unheard visitor left the back gate open and set my doggy boy free. By the time I realised he was gone it was too late and I spent the next five days trying to track him down in the wintry Melbourne suburbs. I called every dog catcher and pound in the phone book but he had not been seen by any of them. In a final act of desperation I put out a reward through the taxi radio but not one of the drivers had spotted a mutt that fit his description. At the peak of my frustration I broke down and cried at the dinner table and was consoled by a virtual scrum of caring new friends. The despair had faded slightly by the following morning and I started to resign myself to the fact I would never see my trusty companion again. Then as luck would have it I answered a knock at the front door and was greeted by a woman who had my buddy on a leash. Rufus knocked me for a six in his excitement and amid a slobbering, face licking wrestle I found out that the lady's name was Katherine. She was the person in the neighbourhood who took in all of the local strays and she had sighted one of my lost dog posters on a wall near the tram shelter. Rufus had been kept safe less than two hundred feet from my back door and it helped to explain those howls I heard in the night that were strangely non-existent everytime I arrived on the scene. I invited our friendly neighbour in for coffee and we spoke for ages about Rufus and his delectable canine ways. An animal lovers dinner party was arranged for the following evening to which Katherine graciously accepted an invite. Even though Rufus's guardian angel was a vegetarian she liked to eat fish as did all of the other people in the house. I spent the next day preparing a mostly vego feast which was grand in scale and tasty enough to satisfy all who pulled up a chair. Along with my culinary delights the crew also cooked up a batch of marijuana cookies which were warm to the touch and ready to sample with desert. The green wholemeal scones were washed down with home brewed beer and we talked into the evening as the THC in our veins enhanced the collective vibe. By the end of the night we had covered every imaginable philosophical topic and personal truths were revealed which formed the basis of lasting bonds.

Towards the end of winter Stuart and the rest of the crew went to the 'Down to Earth Festival' on the Murray River and we towed the trailer along in the hope I might catch a ride to Byron Bay. The festival was held on the banks of the river near the New South Wales border and it was attended by people from all across the country. With that many freaks in one place I figured I had to meet up with some sympathetic new age type who would help a fellow traveller get back home. Stuart and I unhooked the trailer in the dusty festival carpark and I chained it to a tree.

No dogs were allowed inside of the festival grounds so Rufus had no choice but to spend his time in watchdog mode with my gear. Not knowing how much I would have to chip in for my next ride I had to watch every cent and the price of a festival ticket was a little out of my range. The crew lugged their camping gear through the security patrolled gates and I was left outside with my dog contemplating ways to smuggle us in.

A short walk around the carpark area confirmed that there were plenty of New South Wales number plates around and my trailer would look like a street legal fixture on any of them. It would be far better however if I was inside the gate because I could talk with people in chummy festival settings rather than approaching them as they were preparing to depart for home. After less than one hour of just hanging around I was bored to tears so I made a decision to blow some of my cash on a ticket. As I approached the entrance flicking through my wallet and doing quick sums in my head I bumped into some girls that I knew from Nimbin. To my surprise they produced a ticket which had not been used as the woman it was bought for had gone into labour. I scored the ticket for a token ten dollars from those beautiful nymphs who I am sure live the non materialist way every day of their sweet young lives. Once I was inside the festival grounds all thoughts of dogs and trailers dissolved to quicksilver as my eyes embraced the colour and tribal majesty of the scene before me. I passed by a group of young females who's naked bodies were being covered in red ochre paint. Unclad people swam in the cool waters of the Murray amid a village of tipis, tents and other temporary dwellings. Live acoustic music and spontaneous theatrical displays were happening everywhere I looked and it felt like the perfect event to resume my association with the clan. I found Stewart and the crew setting up camp a little way back from the river and they were blown away by how I had made it in so soon. Their campsite was on the very outskirts of the tent village and there was a perfect mooring location just nearby. Rufus and I needed be as far away from the other festival goers as we could get so I scouted around a bit further along from Stuart's camp and found a spot where we could camp without anyone knowing we were there. A sweet, elderly gate keeper listened in a slightly amused way as I described my situation. He not only agreed to my doggy smuggling proposal up the river but he proved most helpful in it's final enactment. There was a small inlet running alongside the carpark which passed under a bamboo and barbed wire bridge.

After getting the boat in the water the bridge was pulled to one side by a group of muscular young hippie guys and I putted onto the main river with Rufus's nose poking out from under a blanket. Smiles were exchanged by all as I departed the inlet and I stood up in a victory salute that was given a hearty cheer. As I turned onto the main body of water I realised that the people on the opposite bank were not a part of our festival.

A gathering of pisshead, speedboat freaks were whooping it up on the other side of the river as I merrily putted by. I was still standing up after my salute operating the throttle when I heard the roar of a V8 engine that sounded awfully close to my boat. Fuck! It was that close and I didn't even have a chance to sit down before his bow wave hit my stern and upended the boat. As the dingy toppled over Rufus and I went into the drink along with all of my camping gear. The spinning propeller of my engine was framed by blue sky as it did a sickening final splutter and died. A group of quick minded festival people dived in and retrieved my belongings as myself and the dog scrambled for the bank. The moronic boatie had increased his throttle to full stick on my port side and then shot off up the river at top speed. His cronies were laughing their stupid heads off as they sucked on beers and made insulting hand gestures towards the hippies. The dingy was turned the right way up in the water by my helpers and we set about filling it with my soaking wet stuff. I had to row out to the campsite I had found and just as I got there the rain came down and turned our sunny festival into a quagmire. I threw a tarp over a fallen tree and got a small fire going to dry out my belongings. I had just completed the makeshift shelter when a single speedboat came flying past on the river baring the infantile name of 'REDNECK'. The driver of the vessel must have spotted my tinny near the bank and I heard drunk, Neanderthal laughter coming from the vanishing speedboat. The sun shone for about three hours the next day which allowed me to dry out most of my stuff and when that was done I left Rufus to go and have some fun. We stayed at the festival for five days altogether and I got to meet a bunch of great people who were driving North after the event. The ride that I eventually settled on was with a guy called 'Mushroom Brian' who was the owner of an old model ford wagon. His car was the only one there with a light socket that matched the trailer. He was an easygoing chap who said he wanted just eighty dollars for petrol and he made it quite clear that he would only take me on the understanding I would not allow him consume any magic mushrooms when we got to Byron Bay.

'Done deal Mr. Mushroom Head'.



LIKE A SPIRAL IN A SPIRAL



'ZORBA IS DANCING" SAID THE TOWNSFOLK.

'SURELY HE HAS GONE MAD.'

AND ZORBA SAID, ... "SHOULD I NOT DANCE,

I SURELY WOULD GO MAD"

It's as if my departure from South Oz and the landscape of my origins was a mystical and almost pre-ordained event and it signalled the dawn of a whole new era for me. Up to that point the sum total of my life's experience had been like some kind of test of my spiritual fortitude and once the last ritual was completed I no longer felt I had to prove a thing to myself or anyone else. I had successfully dipped my twinkly toes in the tumbling surf of worldly ambitions and I'd sampled the sweet tasting fruits that public approval can bring. Beyond mere stardom on the world stage I started perceiving my future role as a thing which should be of historical and even anthropological significance. I'm quite sure that hidden deep down in our vast and rich organic faculties there are social improvement initiatives just around the corner waiting to happen. Collective projects that are so innovative, profound and globally game changing that they are greeted by the ever expanding masses as the epitome of pure logic. Like the invention of fire, computers or Bit coin. Ideas that are so riveting and all pervasive that the world is suddenly thrust into a new epoch of purpose in the cosmos. On my return to the 'Land of the Rainbows' my personal sense of purpose was fuelled for the most part by anything remotely connected with rallies, protests, blockades and festivals. With the passing of my old pal Rufus I became more of a hermit than I had ever been and other than the odd brief affair my only real human contact was with those I knew from the frontline. I still sang my ditties at every available chance but only those with substance and meaning, as the silly old love songs faded away.

FULL CIRCLE

The trailer banged and bounced over countless muddy potholes as we exited the festival carpark but it settled down to a steady roll after we hit the bitumen road. The thing was a vintage to say the least and the wheels were no bigger than those found on household wheelbarrows and the like. Once on the highway Brian immediately took the ford up to over a hundred clicks an hour and I had to ask him to watch it with the race track accelerations. He was a compulsive chatterbox even more chronic than myself and the worst thing of all was the fact he spoke with his hands most of the time. In the end I had to plead with him to keep his hands on the wheel and from then on a detectable friction emerged between us. Two hours into the trip the negative vibes were forgotten as an almighty bang came from the rear. Then the sickening crunch of a wheel hub was heard dragging along the tar. One of the wheels on the trailer had popped its nuts and was rolling off into a field. The sparks that were created by the friction were flying well past the mudguards, but the load held stable as Brian applied the brakes. We pulled over to examine the damage and were amazed at the smouldering mess we found. The entire wheel hub was gone and the metal suspension springs were all that sat between the wooden boxboards of the trailer and the road. The boards had actually started to burn and I had to splash a bottle of water around them to prevent the whole trailer going up in flames.

Brian and I discussed the most practical thing to do and it was agreed I should abandon the trailer and stack my gear on the roof. We unhooked the smoking wreck from the station wagon and hid it behind a cluster of bushes at the roadside. The boat was loaded onto the roof racks and the rest of my stuff was crammed in underneath it. The nose of the dingy pointed skyward as we resumed our journey and the arse end of the car was dragging so low on the shockers that it signalled a bust just waiting to happen. Brian kept the speed to a minimum in the hours that followed as he was carrying an ounce of pot that was tucked away in behind the dash. This just added to our shared sense of paranoia. Our conversation was soon to become more like a script rehearsal for the authorities than any kind of casual, driving chatter. We thought deep and hard about the problem and eventually it was agreed that we would act like spaced out cosmic star children if any cops should cross our path. Brian said he had a doctors report to prove he was, "Not all there in the brain box" and it had got him out of trouble a few times in the past. He said that country bumpkin policemen had no idea how to deal with North coast fliptops so they generally let them go rather than contend with all the paperwork and other complications. I only hoped it was true because I hadn't paid an outstanding dope fine and being pulled over could land my freewheeling, space cadets arse in the local lockup.



Nutty as a Fruitcake

*Sitting in this wonderful place I've come to understand
why they wanted to put me away I did get quite out of hand
I told the priest who baptised me I thought I had been chosen
there was a mission incomplete from ignorance I had risen.
I told an officer of the law that I had walked the earth before
that I had travelled time and space and then I sang him Amazing grace.
He expressed how he thought me quite insane too many drugs inside my brain
then he locked me behind steel bars and he paid no attention to my ...*

ha! ... ha! ... haaa's!

*Now the only person who listens to me
is the little yellow bird in the pyramid tree.
Yesterday they tried to feed me cake
but that awful slice of poison I just wouldn't take.
There were walnuts on the icing like a hundred little brains.
I can't eat them ... they're all insane ... fla! ... ha! ... ha! ... ha! ... haaaaaa! ...
Hooo! Hoooooooo!*

Our much dreaded and inevitable encounter with the law came to fruition as we crossed a small town railway track after getting some fuel at the general store. The cop was parked behind a wheat silo just waiting for his next victim and we didn't see him until the blue flashing light came up on us from behind. Brian was straight out of the car after we pulled over and he was chattering in the cops open window like a two bob watch. From the reflection in the rear view mirror I could tell that the highway copper was a little freaked out by his latest customer and he made a distinct backing off motion as he listened to Brians in the face rave. Brian produced his licence and disability pension card with a deliberate shaking of the hands and I could hear him saying, "I'm on largactol twice a day officer" and, ... "My Doctor says that I am manic depressive with delusions of grandeur. I am also prone to psychotic episodes if I run out of medicine". The cops face was noticeably whiter as he handed back the licence and let Brian off with a warning. We laughed and chuckled like fellow prankster, outlaws as we drove away up the highway bound for the Land of the Rainbows, rolling a big fat joint of his weed. We had no more heart stopping encounters with the police and we made it safely into Byron bay with the new days rising sun. I gave Brian the eighty dollars we had agreed on and when I offered him a bit more money for his trouble he refused it by saying, "Nah! The journey was a real hoot man".

As the sun rose over my old lagoon in the Billongil estuary we unloaded the car at the end of the boggy wetland track. Brian stayed around for yet another celebratory smoke from his stash of Gippsland heads but he was keen to get out of Byron for fear of being tempted to eat some mushies. His final destination was the Cedar Bay community in Far North Queensland where he planned to live as a breatharian and devote his life to the gentle art of meditation. Based on what I knew of him it seemed like an absurd ambition because he was such a hyped up little character. Then again you never can tell with some people and it might have been just the thing he needed to kick his tripping habit. After the joint was finished Brian departed up the track with a somewhat lighter load and I commenced to set up camp in my old site. A mood of intense satisfaction came with my return to the Byron shire but as the day progressed I found myself counting the moments until I could get to the houseboat and make the circle complete. Baby mullet broke the surface of the lagoon and it was reassuring to know the wetland system had started to recover after the fishkill. I landed a couple of good sized bream which gave me a healthy fight and they showed no sign of any toxic contamination. One of my old crab pots was still sitting where I had left it in the mangroves, so I threw in some fish scraps and dropped it into the muddy water. Some of the wire had rusted through but it still looked as if it would hold any big buck that climbed through the entry slot.

Within four hours of my arrival back on the estuary I had pulled in three big fat mudcrabs, two bream, a flathead and a giant Conga eel, which Rufus made short work of. After breakfast we walked along the beach into Byron and I drank in the new age, surf culture atmosphere of my favourite Australian town. I reconnected with a battalion of old friends in cafe's and other haunts, with welcome home bong sessions being the main activity of my day. Around sunset as I was leaving to walk back up the beach I came upon a group of guitar strumming minstrels in the dunes. They were playing ambient folk songs which complimented the mood I was in and provided the perfect tranquil atmosphere for days end. My sense of calm was short lived because the following morning I was hit with yet another crisis to deal with. I noticed as we were having breakfast that Rufus didn't seem his normal, bouncy self. He turned his nose up at a flathead frame I threw to him and he wasn't interested in playing with his ball. I assumed that he was still all pigged out on the eel and taking it easy, but I made a mental note to keep an eye on him anyway. My first task of the day was to check the newly repaired crab pot I had dropped in the upper reaches of the estuary. Rufus seemed ok getting into the boat but once at our destination he just sat in the bow licking his hind leg. I immediately zoomed in on the spot he was licking and located a blood filled cattle tick which had dug in for a banquet. Without even bothering to check the crabpot I fired up the outboard motor and gunned it towards the road bridge at top speed. I had to lift my buddy out of the boat and hoist him all the way up the slope as his back legs were starting to buckle. A kind lady driver spotted me hauling my dog along the roadside and she pulled over to lend us a hand. The woman drove Rufus and I straight to the local vet where he was administered a life saving antidote.

I was between fortnightly payments and the vet made me sign a release form to certify that I would pay the bill when next I received a cheque. Once the form was signed the money grabbing deadshit emitted a self satisfied little smile before he inserted the needle. Our mercy dash paid off and within three days Rufus was up and about back to his normal self. To beat the tick problem I constructed a tarp and mosquito netting shelter on the riverbank and I checked him regularly for any blood suckers that might happen to get through. The shelter was pretty big so he was quite content just hanging around inside it and he only went out to the toilet when he needed to. I rigged up the dingy as my sleeping quarters with an extendable canopy I had recycled from an abandoned mini moke. The installation of the new canopy setup meant the only ticks I had to worry about getting into my bedroll were any that might drop from the foliage above and penetrate the layers of insect protection. The underlining support for my bedroll was a six foot length of ply which was laid across the aluminium seats.

When I stretched out to sleep the nose of the boat was about ten inches from my pillow and my toes could just about touch the outboard motor. Once the tarp and mosquito netting were strapped up around the canopy it could be layed flat on the bow while I was motoring along and if I was caught in a sudden shower the whole thing could be pulled into use with three easy strap connections. The mosquito nets on the tinny were easily joined by octopus straps to the larger shelter at the waters edge which meant after I had moored the dingy for the night I could move between my easy chair on the bank and my floating bed without being eaten alive by mozzies. When Rufus was fully recovered I left him to guard the camp and walked into the Epicentre to seek out my old mate out Danny. The belongings I had left stored in his studio had to be transported to Brunswick Heads and as usual he was the best option I had of doing it. I found Danny in his workshop frantically constructing a stage prop for a forthcoming music festival and as he worked to meet his deadline I gave him an update on my river dwelling adventures. On hearing my needs Danny offered me his limited services which was greatly appreciated as the music festival started in just two days. The next morning in a fit of rushed activity we loaded up his F 100 truck with my stuff and carted it to a storage facility not far from the North arm boatramp. If no more cars were available as I was getting established I figured that I would be able to lug my gear from the depot down to the water using the buggy that Danny had so kindly help me make. What a great bloke. I didn't put the boat and it's associated gear into storage because I felt it would be a more majestic re-entry if I completed the last leg of the journey from open water.

The motor had not been used since the incident on the Murray so I had to pull it apart right down to the headbolts to get it going. After much chord pulling, cursing and blasts of lubricant spray the thing finally fired up but it spluttered and smoked worse than I had ever seen it perform. The engine settled into a more steady rhythm after a minute or so of sporadic revving so Rufus and I putted out of the lagoon and set up a new camp at the mouth of the estuary. At our new campsite I had to sit and wait for a couple of days for the perfect ocean boating conditions to prevail. I sat on the beach scrutinising the sea and the sky until eventually the water became calm and flat. The wind had dropped back considerably to a gentle coastal breeze. The weatherman said that conditions were going to remain stable for three more days, so the following day we set out through the mouth of the estuary as the early tide started coming in. I walked the boat through the shallow breakers with the engine putting just above idle and then jumped back on board when the water started to get a little deeper. I took the throttle up a couple of notches as we bounced over some small waves and then we were riding calm waters towards the Brunswick river.



**MY OCEAN CROSSING TO BRUNSWICK HEADS. THE PICTURE IS COURTESY
OF A TOPLESS, SUNBAKING AMERICAN BACKPACKER I ENLISTED TO TAKE THE SHOT**

There was moonlight on the sea

and the band played deliver my soul to thee

fare thee well old Titanic fare thee well

The conditions stayed relatively calm for most of the trip but as our destination came into view the wind began to increase. As I approached the wave crashing bar in the distance I encountered strange movements in the current which caused the engine to struggle well beyond it's 5hp capacity. The sparkplug started misfiring like it was about to stall and it didn't feel like a good time to start fiddling around with my toolkit. The Brunswick heads bar is one of the most dangerous on the Eastern sea board and I was suddenly struck by the revelation that I was too inexperienced to make it through with a failing engine. The jagged rock walls of the narrow entrance were far less inviting than the flat sandy shoreline, so I opted for a beach landing directly in front of the surf rescue tower. I was about a hundred feet from the churning waters of the mouth when I turned in a new direction back out to sea and away from the rock walls. By this stage the erratic currents were causing the engine to surge and cavitate so badly that it stalled in a sickening, dying splutter.

'REDNECK!'

In the time it took me to get positioned and start pulling the chord we had drifted about twenty feet in towards the bar. The motor just didn't want to respond and to attempt any mid sea repairs was out of the question. I stood up and started waving to some elderly rock fishermen who were getting closer by the second. One of them recognised my signs of distress and he started to put his fishing rod down. He gave me a friendly little wave to acknowledge the situation and then started attempting to scramble up the rocks. The breeze was working against me as we drifted ever closer towards the land and it was time for some quick decisions. The old guy looked arthritic and I knew he was going to be much too slow to be of any use so we had no option but take our chances in the drink. I had Rufus's collar in my left hand and his underbelly in my right when the sound of a fast revving two stroke engine came as sweet music to my ears. From a setting of imminent, sea faring tragedy it turned into an action packed rescue scene as a fast moving, surf rescue official shouted, "Here catch this" and threw me a line. I wrapped the nylon rope in a handful of wet Tshirt material and held on for dear life as they towed me and my dog away to safety. My stalled propeller couldn't have been any more than ten feet away from the rocks as we moved out of the bubble zone and into the flow of the river. I tied up near a boat ramp about six hundred feet past the bar and thanked the two rescue guys from the bottom of my heart. They said that I was very lucky anyone had seen me from the tower because one of the rescue volunteers had called in sick with the flu. At the last minute he decided that he was well enough to do his shift and I was the lucky bastard he spotted on his arrival heading for those treacherous rocks.

'WONDERFUL PEOPLE THOSE RESCUE GUYS'

I was pretty shaken by our close call on the bar and all I really wanted to do was set up camp in a quiet spot and go fishing. Too much was happening far too quick for my liking and the slow meditation of the hunt is the best way I have found to gather up my scattered thoughts. The unfolding events of my life were spiralling out of control and I seriously started to wonder if I had bitten off more than I could chew with my 'Huckleberry Finn' adventures. The near drowning incident on the Murray was much closer to the great hereafter than I like to get and then straight on top of it I almost got myself washed into a friggin rock wall. It's as if the land and the river were telling me to slow down and just be grateful I was home and alive to enjoy it.

The next day the tide was high enough to carry the boat over the many snags and obstacles I had placed between my hidden houseboat mooring and the main arm of the river. I dropped the throttle back to a low putt as I approached the hanging curtain of rainforest foliage and instantly I was alarmed. The careful arrangement that Alicia and I left on our departure from the river had been disturbed by more than just a passing storm. I moved the dingy in through the narrow opening and found to my absolute dismay the burnt out remains of my home. The houseboat had been destroyed by fire and the scorched pontoons were the only part of the structure left afloat. The overhanging rainforest branches were charred by the blaze and it still smelt relatively smokey. My first imaginings of the culprits was a pack of those teenage fuckwits who hire dingys in town and come up the river to get pissed and go fishing. As I might of expected the trailbike was nowhere to be found and it's disappearance signalled the end of my river dwelling adventure on the old Bruns. The solemn words of Mr. Metaphysicus, "Non Attachment" echoed through my thoughts as I struggled to comprehend the magnitude of my situation. The whole journey from the moment I left for South Australia now appeared like a supreme test of my ability to attain worldly detachment. The spiritual revelations that manifested in those moments left little room for anger and instead I was touched by a mood of melancholy acceptance. Rufus and I putted away from the wreck of my houseboat and headed back down the river. I established a new camping location well away from the path of any vandals or thieves and just took it easy the way life had been telling me to from the moment I arrived. For six days I spoke to no-one but my dog and that infernal chatterbox who lives inside my head. I examined all of the available options and concluded that a rest from great outdoors adventuring was my most logical next step. My creative projects had become more like a hobby as of late and all hope of a floating, solar powered recording studio had gone up in smoke. I was forced by circumstance to accept that I had to rent a space somewhere so I could get my dog and I into a safety zone and resume a more creative daily routine.

The bait and tackle store that used to sit in the middle of Brunswick Heads was called 'The Fishing Hole' and it served as a local anglers hangout which stayed open late in the night during the summer months. Alicia and I used to go into the shop quite often to hang out with the owners who were big city party animals in exile named Zee and Mark. The pair had moved to the Northern rivers in a last desperate attempt to try and kick their smack habits. Zee was the Owner of the shop and her aggressive little, toy boy lover was known by the nickname of 'Critter' by the Fishing Hole crew. He did all of the fishing rod repairs and pretty well kept the shop going while Zee mixed drinks for anyone who would listen to the sad details of her life.

A group of the younger anglers from the Fishing Hole clan had recently taken a lease on a two storey building up on the highway and there was a small room available on the lower ground level. A weekly rent of forty dollars was agreed upon between drinks and exaggerated fishing stories and I moved into the place the following day. The room was not much bigger than a bathroom but that didn't matter because everything I needed was there. Electricity from the grid which meant I could start multi-tasking with my musical equipment and an enclosed back yard so Rufus would be protected from the cars and semi-trailers on the Pacific highway. There were a couple of mean looking staffy's living on the property that belonged to the other tenants and it meant vicious fighting unless they were kept well separated. Apart from the dog thing I didn't have to think about too much at all and the place was a welcomed change from camping out in swamps and jungles. Prior to the arrival of the anglers the building was a refuge for wayward youth. It had been run by a kind soul called 'Mo' who was a pioneer crusader for homeless kids. A large group of them walked from the North coast to Canberra promoting their cause and eventually they secured enough government funding to build a youth shelter in Brisbane. It was not unusual to have young strangers just walk into the place at all hours of the day and night thinking that it was still a refuge for homeless kids. One of the guys at the house had an old Morris van and he helped me to get my stuff out of the storage facility just up the road. After we had unloaded the gear onto an adjoining concrete driveway beside the house I established a music and writing studio beside my bedroll in the pokey little room. Once comfortably settled into my new workstation I got started on the multitude of tasks I couldn't get done with the limitations of twelve volt power. From a life of fast moving outdoors adventure my days suddenly became a lot more routined and artistically disciplined. The only time I went out fishing was when the lads came in with a large catch and I knew it would be worth the effort to unchain the boat. The rest of the time I just got my nose down and steadily brought the script to completion.

Most of the writing was out of the way after just a couple of weeks, so I started to further develop the recordings for the musical soundtrack. The bulk of my original master tapes were badly moisture damaged after their outdoors excursions and rust had started to form on the little casing screws. Before I could even test them out on the four track I had to disassemble each of the tapes and get the spools moving with my fingers and a ball point pen. By this stage digital technology had superseded analogue as the dominant home studio format and my mission was to salvage the cassettes as best I could and transfer their contents to compact disk.

The other guys in the house left me pretty much to my own devices and we only connected to check out the days catch or smoke some bongs on the upstairs porch. There was one among the group called Ed who fancied himself as a poet and he would often pop in at the worst possible moments to recite his latest, soulful lament. The work was incoherent babble at best but I told him it was improving in leaps and bounds as I ushered him out the door. The only other regular interruption to my creative endeavours was the sound of a terrible church choir every Sunday morning. Our building sat adjacent to a little weatherboard church and Sunday morning hangovers were made worse having to endure the faith inspired mumbling their way through one flat and passionless hymn after another. I generally took these unholy awakenings as my cue to take Rufus for a walk and it was hard not to feel like a wretched sinner as I fled those terrible gospel sounds.

GOD AWFUL NOISE!

With our arrival at the house Rufus went into a mode of sleeping most of the time and just waited around until it was time for his daily walk. I became so engrossed in my work that I didn't really think about him unless it was time for a feed or there was a dog fight to break up. One morning after an all night studio work burst I went outside to stretch my legs and take in the quiet emergence of the sunrise. The back gate had been left open sometime during the night and all of the dogs were gone including Rufus. Instantly I snapped out of my pre sleep stupor and jumped on the pushbike to find my dog. I rode up and down the highway from the fisherman's co-op to the bowling club on the edge of town but I didn't see a trace of him anywhere. I spotted the other two dogs going through a garbage bin near the take away food shop and I ordered them to get back home. Three hours later I was still tearing about madly looking for Rufus and I even put the boat in the water to check along the banks. There was not a sign of him anywhere.

By three in the afternoon I was making enquiries to all of the local Vets, Rangers and Police and with each call there came absolutely no cause to get excited. The very last vet on my list was the one in Byron Bay and he informed me that a dog fitting Rufus's description had been brought in during the night. When I asked if the dog was ok I received the heart stopping news that the poor creature had not made it through. Further identifying features were conveyed as I held back a flood of tears and tried to keep a clear head. The single spot of brown hair on his otherwise black fur coat was the unmistakable final confirmation that Rufus was gone.

The Police Officer who brought him in had apparently found him skittled on the highway about three streets up from our house. Still holding back the tears I wrote down the officers contact number and thanked the vet for his help. My call to the police was transferred from the station to a squad car where I received a first hand account of what had taken place. The officer I spoke to let me know in his opening statement that he was a dog lover, then he went on to describe the Brunswick to Byron mercy dash which ended with my faithful companion dying in his arms. As is the case with all unregistered dogs who end their lives on the side of the road Rufus's body was disposed of at the local tip. By the time I got onto the garbage dump attendant the following afternoon he said that the previous days load had already been bulldozed into the landfill. This brief conversation put a full stop on my experience with Rufus and I was left with a sense of barren desolation that held no chance of any real closure. I thought about constructing a monument to my old pal somewhere out on the river but at every spot I passed I could see his eternal, puppy spirit running along the bank to keep up with the boat. There was nowhere I could go without being reminded in some way of my buddy and it was still happening a week later if I stumbled upon one of his half chewed bones or tennis balls. I made a decision to let the room go and split from the Brunswick River because without my dog around the adventure could never be the same.

I emptied the studio and stacked most of my belongings in an unused corner of the ground level storage area. Even my boat and the outboard motor were tarped over with the rest of the gear as I needed a complete break from the river and all that reminded me of Rufus. With just my bedroll and some basic travelling necessities strapped to the buggy I walked down to the bus stop and caught a coach to Byron. I camped in the sand dunes near the Epicentre for about three days without speaking to a soul and just passed away the deep, reflective hours by fishing off the beach. By the fourth day of my mourning the grief had settled down enough that I could face the thought of mingling with other people.

Those who knew Rufus enquired where he was and I had to go over the same horrible story three times, before I retreated to the shade of a secluded pandanus with a hip flask of rum. Even though I had no particular interest in anything at all it came to my attention that a protest action was taking place on Stradbroke Island in the coming days. Apparently It was happening in support of the local Aborigines who were trying to put an end to the sand mining operations. A group of activists were preparing to leave from the Environment Centre that very afternoon so I threw my buggy in the back of a rainbow decorated ute and joined the northbound convoy. Our first stop was a rally at the doors of the Environment Minister in Brisbane. Sand was dumped on the marble steps at the entrance and a corporate effigy was burned.

At events like this I am normally the guy with the megaphone who incites the protesting crowd, but my heart just wasn't in it and I took a back seat from the action. After the Rally our gaggle of adrenaline charged rebels and malcontents drove to the Cleveland warves and caught a car ferry to North Stradbroke Island. It was well after dark when we arrived at the newly established basecamp, which was situated on a wooded patch of ground in view of the passing sand trucks. Every second truck driver blasted his horn as they drove by the protest site and shouts of abuse were accompanied by insulting hand gestures through open cabin windows. The fast moving routine of getting a campsite set up before the rain hits is the best thing to snap anyone out of the doldrums and connecting with the protest tribe further helped to get my head into gear. On the frontline there's an unspoken law that all personal problems are left at the entrance to protest sites, as the ordeals of the collective take priority over any individual. I allowed my thoughts to remain focussed on helping the crew to erect tents and my state of emotional numbness subsided with each new camping obstacle. All of the shelters were secured in place just as the first sheets of driving rain began to fall. I only had my bedroll and a small tarp with me so the people I drove in with let me have a corner of their four man tent.

Whizz! and Jenny were a couple of uni students from Woolongong who were madly in love and they spent every available moment smooching. Jenny's older sister Margaret had decided to give up a skiing holiday to come to the protest and it was the very first time she had been to the frontline. We got speaking as we cruised along on the car ferry and she jumped in the back of the ute with me to hear tales of past blockades. The electricity was unmistakable between us and it came as no surprise when we ended up in the same corner of the tent getting as chummy as our giggling companions. The next morning we rose to warming sunshine in an otherwise saturated camp.

As I walked into the daylight to take a piss the first thing I saw was a litter of happy, bouncing puppies who were chasing their mother and pestering her for a feed. I was feeling a lot better after my slap and tickle therapy session with Margaret but the puppies were the best thing to assure me that life goes on regardless. The highly strung little pups were just at that age where the first friendly pat brings a rolling and tumbling onslaught of affection. I picked up an armful of the little dogs after I had been to the toilet and took them into the tent where Margaret and the others were still dozing. Fun filled screams of joy greeted the puppies as they hopped all over a mountain of squirming sleeping bags. They licked everyone's abruptly woken faces and let out experimental little barks in their boundless and spirited excitement. I escorted the litter back out of the tent to their mother who was waiting patiently by the door. They suckled until they were full and then proceeded to follow me around as I went looking for some dry kindling for the fire.

In the sparkling light of the morning I got a better idea of where our camp was located in relation to the bitumen road and the sandmining operation. The driveway into the excavation was directly across the road and the trucks had been going back and forth from the loading dock since well before dawn. As I was pouring coffee for the crew a truck pulled out of the sandmine driveway and some less than friendly individual hung out of the window and shouted, "wake up you lazy pack of wankers". I shouted back, "why don't you get a proper job fuckhead?" to which he responded with a lame two fingered gesture and drove off. Margaret wandered out of the tent to investigate the commotion and we sat on a log by the fire playing with the pups. Other people started stirring at the smell of fresh coffee and before long the whole camp was up and about for breakfast. There were thirty activists assembled at the blockade and more started arriving as the morning progressed. I recognised a couple of their faces from previous actions and rallies, but they were mostly young, first timers like Margaret. It seemed strange that none of the regular strategists and other organisers were around and when I made enquiries about this I was told that the protest had not officially commenced. It seemed the local Aborigines were still divided about the sand mining issue and some of them had called in the protesters prematurely. The whole community was divided over the sand mining issue and a fair percentage of the local tribe wanted it to go ahead so they could scoop a share of the profits. Two elderly Aboriginal women known as Carol and Donna were among the key inspiritors for the protest and they were firmly convinced they could rid their island of the CRL mining corporation. They set up shelters in the growing tent village and were soon to become the fun loving matriarchs of our group.

No actual protest action could be sanctioned until the Aboriginals reached some common ground, so the setting up of the basecamp was as much as we could do. Some of the more radical young guys were itching to sabotage the noisy sand trucks and mining equipment but with one word from the Coorie women they agreed to bide their time. A tribal vote was scheduled for the following week but in the meantime we just had to sit tight and enjoy the view. The basecamp was better equipped than many I have stayed at with a fully stocked food tent sufficient to keep us going for weeks. There were full sacks of every imaginable bean, noodle or vegetable and I was quick to secure a position as one of the camps main chefs. A large sheltered information stand was erected on the site and the artists got working on a number of impressive banners. Margaret and I played key roles in the creation of the protest banners and it served as an ideal collaboration for our blossoming romance. Once the site was fully operational it became something of an island holiday as everybody waited for the word to go into frontline action mode. Margaret and I spent most of our time preparing food for the clan and when we weren't doing that we were off in the tent getting stoned and making love. We went fishing everyday and sometimes in the cool breeze of the evening. The fishing on Stradbroke Island was better than any I had experienced in my travels and big golden trevally were the prize catch if my handlines didn't snap at the hook or go flying off into the drink. Much of what we caught was incorporated into the basecamp menu for those who liked fish and those who didn't were treated to a host of vegetarian delights. Donna's nephew Dale had a fairly large wooden hulled dingy and when he saw how keen a fisherman I was he invited us out for a cruise. Margaret caught the biggest bream I think I have ever seen and at days end our boating excursion was made perfect by a pair of dugongs swimming close to the bow. I was taken by a sudden wave of emotion when I found myself imagining Rufus hanging off the bow and barking at the slow moving creatures. Knowing what had happened to my dog Margaret consoled me and Dale rolled a joint of filthy local weed that helped me to laugh it off as history. Like Whizz and Jenny many of the protest crew were university students who were into techno music and everything that goes with the culture. In the evenings after dinner electronic sounds came blasting out of a car hi-fi system and the clan would doof on till sunrise. Sometimes guitars and other instruments were produced and we were treated to sweet rolling folk music. At one of our nightly parties we were visited by an elder of the local tribe who had been invited by Donna and Carol. When first he arrived he appeared the wise old tribal leader, but after a few green ginger wines he babbled incoherently and drew obscure little pictures in the sand. As the plunk took hold of his self composure the old guy summoned me to his side and pulled my head down close to his.

I thought I might have been in for a dose of sacred wisdom or the like, but instead he enquired if I could walk him across the road to take a crap. It came as a great relief when the poor old drunk proved capable of wiping his own arse and I managed to deliver him back to the fire without us being squashed by a passing truck. Margaret and the others had to get back to Wollongong for a family wedding and I was invited to go along if I chose. I decided to let them go without me and stayed on at the base camp because it was predicted that a full blown blockade was going to unfold within the next couple of days.

Maggie and I parted after much smooching and extensive plan making which I knew in my deeper being would never come to fruition. She was a lovely girl but the last thing I needed was emotional entanglements to further complicate my life. I was still getting Alicia out of my system and on top of Rufus's death I was not prepared to deal with any new complications. The blockade never transpired as we had hoped because any attempt at negotiations saw one side or the other walking out of the tribal meetings. Things started getting more heated between the protesters and the sand truck drivers until our first casualty came hobbling into the camp nursing a broken nose. One of the truckies spat the dummy right in the middle of town and confronted a group of our people who had gone in to buy supplies. After punching out a skinny little, dreadlocked, peacenik the irate truck driver went after a couple of fast running females with a wheel wrench. The lack of protest action that was happening caused most of our troops to head back to the mainland until there was just myself and four other hardy souls left to keep the campaign going. Our diminishing numbers did not go un-noticed by the sandmine supporters and in the dead of night while we were sleeping an earth shaking bang blasted the camp. We woke to find that one of our two support vehicles was alight and sending a column of blue and orange fire into the starry night sky. The fire was quickly extinguished with water from the kitchen and the car was abandoned along with our food tent and a heap of useful equipment. We notified the local police of what had happened from the safety of the ferry terminal and our so called public protectors were nowhere to be seen as we drove onto the ramp. The incident didn't even make the local rag on the island and nine months later the owner of the burned out car was still fighting a losing battle in a sea of officially contrived red tape.



CHAPTER SIX

GETTING GROUNDED ON CLOUD, . . .



At the towering, cloud capped pinnacles of my philosophical and intellectual flights of fancy I have pondered the very elitist notion that beside the duties of planetary stewardship the call to Social, Anti war and Environmental activism are the most worthwhile vocations that life has to offer the thinking man. And of course that includes all of those whoah! Man's out there. So. In light of this profound revelation I have decided that a crusading knight in hemp fabric is what I want to be for the remainder of my days on this inter-stellar, life support orb. In my time of walking the earth various opportunities have emerged from out of the commercial music game but my heart just wasn't in it for the acquisition of mere monetary gain. I have sung my protest anthems to ten thousand eco-sympathisers young and old at non violent, mass rallies and I have savoured the moment as they all joined in to sing along. Those events provided a buzz greater than any other I could ever imagine in this lifetime and I know that I will go to the great here after a contented soul.

In the mid nineteen eighties I joined a local environment group in the Blue mountains and I dedicated much of my time to helping them out with various public information campaigns that involved everything from composting and organic food production to recycling, free energy generation and a whole lot more besides. It was without a doubt the most productive period of my life and my time was shared with an extended tribal family with whom I have no bloodline connection, only the unifying spirit of peace and universal co-operation.

‘ OM NAMAH SHIVIYA ’



THE ROAD TO ECO-TOPIA

The violence and community hostility that forced our hasty retreat from the 'Straddie basecamp' brought home the magnitude of the vast divide that exists between the green lobby and the majority of blue collar workers. By their actions the Stradbroke Island community proved conclusively that people will stop at nothing if their livelihood is threatened. I saw the same sort of thing at Chealundi and other national campaigns but it had never represented such an out and out threat to human life. Luckily the burning car didn't set our whole camp on fire but it very well could have should we not have woken up in time. It seemed rather strange that I had put my river dwelling adventures on hold to live a less dangerous existence and there I was wiping my brow after yet another close call. I had to conclude that my time would be best spent if I gave the frontline a break for a while. For the next few months I stayed in a friends spare room at Billongil and I did volunteer work at the Byron Bay Environment centre. The Gippsland blockade kicked off during that time and I found myself more than content just organising car pools and photocopying escarpment maps for the protesters. One day while I was doing an afternoon shift my old pal Captain Casual breezed in through the door. We hadn't seen each other since the Tanalorn Festival and it was great to catch up over a joint in the tea room. The Captain said he was only in the area for a couple of days, then he was heading back to his home in the Blue Mountains. The room where I was staying in Billongil had been designated as a practice room for a local band, so I asked Caz if there was enough space in his van for myself and the buggy. There was ample room in his Tarago camper for me and my gear and to top it all off he offered to put me up for a while in exchange for a little artistic help. He and his volunteer helpers were developing a campaign to promote Local council approved recycle bins in the Blue Mountains and I jumped at the opportunity without a second thought. It was right in line with my new 'pro-education' resolve and besides I needed a roof over my head for the winter.

Captain Casual is the most zealous activist for world peace and the environment I have ever encountered and he has implemented social change at every level from the distribution of pamphlets on the streets to the implementation of solution strategies in the halls of power. The information pamphlets he used to distribute at our busking shows and his skills as a public motivator helped to bring about the United Nations 'Year of the Tree' in the early eighties.

For the sake of the story we will call our small but effective environment group, 'The Union of Aspiring Planet Savers'. The Planet Savers Organisation started life in the central business district of Sydney, in a swanky fourth floor location which was owned by the Captain's well to do family. He has often been heard in mixed company describing how his clan are successful merchants from "proud Phoenician stock" and our dear Captain likes to refer to himself as, 'The Rainbow sheep of the family'. He has no doubt inherited the business instincts of his wheeling and dealing ancestors, but he prefers to channel his talents into the blossoming realms of the 'New Age' marketplace. His first dealings with the public began in a Kings Cross poster shop that he ran in the nineteen sixties. While going through his extensive archives down in the cellar of our headquarters one day I discovered copies of all those amazing psychedelic posters you used to see around the place. He even has the one that hung on Lee Turners wall which said, ... 'Save Water Shower with a Friend'.



The Captain and I share a fascination with message related art and it's been like a uniting thread that has fuelled our collaboration through the years. We were travelling pretty close to each others orbits throughout the busking years and he was a great influence on many of my eco-inspired songs. I was a passionate young bard who was yet to shed the role of the angry young man and quite often it reflected in my words. One time as he listened intently to a newly recorded piece a distinctive frown became lodged in his wise old hippy brow. When I asked him what was up he took a long concentrated pause before answering. His reply was short but effective and it altered my ability to self edit from that moment on. He said, " I love the words in the chorus that say 'Until This War Is Won' but don't you think it might reach a wider audience with, 'Until Our Work Is Done'? That diplomatic little consciousness jolt was enough to bring home the confronting truth that if I didn't drop my mistrust of humanity then I was no better than those I hoped to inspire.

The Wind Through The Banners

*There's an old ragged banner, hanging high up in the trees.
'Save the World For The Children', blowing in the breeze.
Land Rights flags and rainbows for all the world to see.
'Save the World For The Children' and that's alright by me.*

chorus

*I hear the wind through the banners, when I go to sleep at night.
Rustling through the trees, as I lay by the firelight.
We'll keep those banners flying high my friend, until our work is done.
We're gonna make the world a safer place, for every single one.*

*We fought hard for the trees in the Nightcap,
at Chealundi and Wingham state.
At Aidex and at Pine Gap we were chained up to the gate.
At Emerald beach and Bondi we said, 'Keep Our Oceans Clean'.
Save the world for the children and you know what that means.*

I hear the wind through the banners when I go to sleep at night ...

*You've seen us in the rallies, at the blockades and on TV.
You've heard us tell the whole wide world how we think things should be.
We are the Rainbow Warriors and our work has just begun.
Make the world a safer place ... for every single one.*

I hear the wind through the banners when I go to sleep at night ...

*There's an old ragged banner, hanging high up in the trees.
'Save The World for the children', blowing in the breeze.
Land Rights flags and rainbows for all the world to see.
'Save The World For The Children' and that's alright by me.*

*I hear the wind through the banners, when I go to sleep at night.
Rustling through the trees, as I lay by the firelight.
We'll keep those banners flying high my friend, until our work is done.
We're gonna make the world a safer place, for every single one.*

The Planet savers moved out of the Sydney CBD in the mid eighties and set up their Blue mountains headquarters just outside of Hazelbrook. The transition was to a picturesque eleven acre estate with neatly manicured grounds equal to any botanical garden I have seen. The property was christened the 'Wisdom Gardens' and it evolved over time to become a living showcase for the practice of Edible Landscape Gardening. As well as fully matured examples of the best trees on the planet the estate had extensive Perma-culture gardens that were tended by an army of green thumbed volunteers. I was living in a caravan on the property at the time and the daily selection of fresh fruit and vegies I used to harvest were as good as any the local green grocer could offer. Often I made big pots of vegetable soup for the volunteer workers which were enhanced with such delicacies as artichoke hearts and home grown pinenuts. One of the Captains favourite pastimes is sprout germination and I constantly had to invent new ways of incorporating his abundant produce into the meals. At any given moment there were fifteen or more people staying around the property in caravans, tents and tipis. Two houses were situated at the top and the bottom of the valley and they served as fully equipped offices for the promotion of environment friendly solutions in the general community.

Our Captian'o would best be described as a 'Technophile' which means anyone who holds a fascination for things technological or mechanical. I myself lean more towards technophobia and I have great difficulty suppressing the rage when man made devices mysteriously stuff up. Caz just says, "Oh! bother it" and buys a new one whether it be a computer, a photo-copier, a car or anything else. From stories he has shared with the crew it seems that our jolly Captain has lived an affluent and somewhat pampered existence from day one. The story that most summed up his charmed journey through life involved a certain Elvis Presley in a scene that took place at the Las Vegas Hilton in the sixties.

Being of a sturdy and agile physique as a younger man Caz was soaking up the sun by the pool and Elvis pulled up the recliner next to him with a couple of bodyguards in tow. The king and the Captain got chatting about all things gymnasium related and the conversation turned to the possibility of an arm wrestle between the two. As could be expected Elvis won the competition and they ended up having drinks in the Casino later on in the evening. Caz made a point of informing his campfire audience that it was one of the very few acts of public macho bravado he has ever engaged in.

The Wisdom Gardens were host to many a tribal event in the hay day of their existence when the Planet Savers network numbered more than a hundred active members. When we all came together it was a real hoot and our festivals were attended by clan members from as far away as Cairns, Darwin, Broome and Tasmania. The music was always world class at these events and through them I was made aware of a wider selection of issue related folk songs. A recorded catalogue of home crafted tunes began to take shape and it gave rise to a national song writing competition known as the 'Planet Savers Song Quest'. Some renowned composers contributed to the project the likes of John Paul Young, Hans Poulson and Keith Potger from the Seekers. Most of the recordings offered up were created by simple living family people who had no real aspirations to fame, but I saw them as much needed, people power classics with big mainstream potential if handled properly. Should the songs be re-recorded on a more modern format and performed by a cast of established international stars, I thought they might have a chance of opening up a whole new genre of inspirational entertainment.

As well as meeting up with Sting and Bono during my busking and night clubbing days I also made the acquaintance of George Michael, Billy Connolly, Joe Strummer and Robert Plant. My mission in life was to round up as many mega-stars as I could and convince them to support the idea of a celebrity album for the environment. The late Michael Hutchence was more than just a passing acquaintance and we went on to become regular drinking buddies around the traps. Our earliest beginnings got off to a bumpy start, but we came good in time and got to know each other quite well. The reason for the initial friction was because I had pissed him off from the microphone at a gig I did for the bikers in the Watermelon club.

INXS were relatively new on the scene and I had no idea who this pimply faced upstart was, who was trying to muscle in on my gig. I was later introduced to him by BJ the club President over lines of Bolivian cocaine and tequila. In the years that followed Micheal and I discussed the possibility of getting together creatively to record a song for the celebrity album. We met up in Rhino Studios not long after the band bought it and arrangements were put in place to schedule some recording time. Our first collaborative meeting was cut short by a certain Kylie Minogue who came storming into the studio in a blind seething, post ecstatic rage.

This was at the peak of those reckless and infamous days that I am sure she would prefer to forget. I was there to orchestrate a romantic, anthemistic duet with the darlings of the Australian entertainment scene and the two squabbling brats before me looked more like enemies than lovers. Most apologetically Michael raced off after our not so happy little Dancing Queen and no compositions or recordings ever saw the light of day.

World Environment day 1990 in Sydney was the best public display ever presented by the Planet Savers. As well as the many placards and banners we produced for the march, the crowd was entertained by a big rainbow coloured worm who was promoting organic gardening. Planet savers pamphlets, sticker, flags and other assorted novelties were affectionately clutched in the hands of all who heard our call to ecological sanity. The attendance figures at the Environment Day rally were larger than I had ever seen and the vast majority were normal, everyday folk from the suburbs. The collective chant for the Rally was, ... 'One Planet, One People, One Chance' and I was the guy with the megaphone who got to egg them all on. The first hundred feet or so of the marchers were bright eyed, fist raising teenagers who were out to save the world with a passion. They responded well to my happy little traffic hazard directives and they assisted the cops at every turn. Before me was a whole new generation of aspiring planet savers who were standing up to have their say where it mattered most. On the six o'clock news.



MR. MEGAMOUTH ON THE JOB WINDING UP THE 'EARTH REPAIR ARMY'

As the march came into the police barricaded intersection of Park and King streets we discovered that there was a car parked directly in our path. None other than my old drinking pal Michael was hanging in the open door smiling and he said, "Hi! Steve, Whatcha doin?". He must have told the cops that he was part of the entertainment for our festivities and they let him drive through the police barrier. In the back seat of the hire car Michael's mother was looking most embarrassed, like David Letterman's dear old mum when he puts her on the spot. I took my cue from the moment and turned to address the expectant crowd which was more than ten thousand strong. My most show business MC voice was applied to the megaphone as I introduced Michael to his adoring fans and got him to join in the 'One Planet' chant. After the tribal chorus had been filmed by a pack of fast moving television cameramen Micheal and his mother drove out of the intersection to thunderous, cheering applause. The footage of Micheal chanting along with the crowd was featured on all of the evening news broadcasts and it became the decisive moment in which my 'Celebrities For The Environment' theory was made manifest into living reality.



The Captain is an incurable philanthropist and he never hesitates to throw his dwindling reserves into worthwhile projects. One of my fellow volunteer workers at the Wisdom gardens was an independent film maker called Roger Plant. He and I got our heads together one day and came up with an idea for a television special called, 'The Voice Of The People' which was planned as an Info-tainment docco and would feature grass roots perspective's on the global environment crisis. Once completed it would also serve as a platform for the best of our eco-inspired songs. Caz loved the idea and we were promptly assigned a production budget to get the thing up and running. One of the diesel pantec utes from the perma-culture nursery was promptly handed over for the duration of filming and we took off for the Land of the Rainbows to interview the locals.

On the street dialogue filled much of the Hi-8 tape we used, but we also got some great footage of hands on alternative progress in action. One day we would be filming an organically nurtured plot in some exotic location and the next would be spent at an alternative dwelling getting instructions on solar power and wind turbines. From time to time representatives of the Planet Savers were invited to attend public schools and give lectures to the students. Roger and I decided it would be a great idea to incorporate the environmental views and opinions of kids into our docco, so we booked ourselves in for a series of dates. Water conservation was the theme we were given to address at the first of three western suburbs schools and I was supposed to keep the kids interested for over an hour.

The lecture soon turned into an open debate about how people would get on in the event of a reservoir contamination and it concluded with jammed highways leading to the first clean water supply. According to the most nihilistic of the school children, thirst driven escapees would be fighting over the last reserves of bottled water and only the young would survive the ordeal. At the second school the group discussion became equally apocalyptic when I posed the question, "How fast could you establish a food garden if the world was caught in the grip of a global fuel shortage?". We didn't get to do the third school because the Administrator considered my questions far too provocative for the children. It became apparent with the cancellation of our final lecture that I was supposed to chat away about the superficial aspects of the environment and not actually get down to the nitty gritty of what is happening in the world. In spite of the small mindedness that prevailed Roger still managed to shoot some valuable footage for the docco and thus completed the age spectrum of the community at large.

They say that "A camel is a horse that was designed by a committee" and my time with the Planet Savers is living testimony that it's true. At the end of the day it was Captain Casual who personally financed any projects the management group proposed and any he didn't endorse got the boot. New management committees came and went more frequently than the changing of the seasons and all of them had private agendas that determined their meeting room votes. The same kind of backstabbing and conniving you will find anywhere in the world of business was the norm at our weekly pow wows and it wasn't unusual for the meetings to explode in a shit storm of uncontrolled passion. When Roger and I returned from our northern filming excursion we found that a newly formed committee had been conspiring against us in our absence. Our production budget was in the spotlight and there was even talk of using some of the money to finance other projects. I hit the roof when it was my turn to speak and I told all of the self righteous newcomers exactly where they could get off.

I had been a volunteer with the organisation longer than all of them put together and I made this fact known in no uncertain terms. My main opponent was teary eyed and defeated at the climax of her address and the best she could come out with was, "Well how come you two get money to go holidaying all over the country and I have to work in this fucking office all day?". The mood of the gathering was elevated somewhat when Roger and I looked at each other smiling and said in spontaneous, almost psychic unison,... "We're Special".

After moving back to the Wisdom Gardens from Stradbroke Island I set up my camp in a disused, dome shaped sweat lodge that was situated beside a large pond with cascading waterfalls. The dome sat in the shade of some tall gum trees and it was one of the most perfect studio settings I had lived in up to that point. Things had changed dramatically since last I was in residence at the Wisdom gardens and the best part was the fact that the management group had dissolved into the mists of time.



OFF FOR A MORNING WALK WITH TOOTSIE

As the result of dwindling volunteer numbers and depleting cash reserves all of the Perma-culture plots had fallen into a state of disrepair and the only produce I could find was some woody old carrots and parsnips and a handful of wrinkly old spuds. The apple and pear orchards were overgrown with weeds and so were the once tidy bitumen paths that led around the estate. Only a small group of volunteers remained on the property in an attempt to keep it going and support our host Caz in his efforts to repay an ever increasing bank loan. The Captain's wealthy relatives propped him up with a number of refinancing strategies, but sadly the money ran out after he exceeded a million bucks. The Wisdom Gardens were placed on the open market and our quest to save the environment was superseded by the daunting task of trying to save our headquarters from the auctioneers hammer. A number of hair brained schemes were proposed by certain members of the group and it was decided that the best way to keep the property was to subdivide.



The idea was ok in itself but the hastily thought up salvage plan revealed a gaping a hole so big that you could drive a Mack truck through it. The lawyer in whom the Captain had placed his trust was a former committee member and a militant Anti Smoking Lobbyist. He actually wrote into the draft lease contract that any occupant who was caught smoking a ciggie on the estate would be asked to vacate their position. On top of this no meat of any description was to be consumed in the grounds and each lease holder had to prove they peddled only eco-friendly wares or services. I can't imagine any proprietor agreeing to these strict terms no matter how new age inspired they are and that's exactly how the bank saw things as well. Right at the point of foreclosure the Captain's family came to the rescue with yet another, absolute, final handout to save the land. The arrival of this most encouraging news meant our real estate crisis had subsided for the time being and the only hint of friction that ever manifested was when the crew ran out of pot.

Joseph was one of the remaining devotees who stayed on the property and he lived in a fully equipped, state of the art recording studio which was set up out in the barn. He's a heavily dreadlocked, multi-media zealot from the sixties who was an early pioneer in psychedelic, visual graphics and electronic sounds. I've sat around with Joseph for hours at a time in his studio watching early videos of such things as the Aquarius Festival in Nimbin and protest footage from the Vietnam war. He and I had a lot in common because we were both writing, composing and applying our skills to the visual arts.



HIPPY DAYS.

The dome was where I started to compile my transcripts for this book and Joseph proved a great listener as I recited him my latest work down by the pond. Karen and Phillip were others who hung around the property in it's final days and they were living in a storage shed up near the rainbow adorned security gates. The couple were born again Christian, eco activists who often helped Caz out around the office. Phil was also producing a 'Christians for the Environment' web page. Often Phillip and I worked side by side at the office computers and he was right there to assist with my many internet blunders. He displayed infinite patience with my endless barrage of questions and we spent long hours at the screen getting stoned and laughing at the world. At the end of my computer sessions with Phil I had most of my music beds digitally processed and downloaded onto wave files.

Yirka our only other neighbour in the grounds of the Wisdom Gardens was a half American Indian with part Chezkoslavakian extraction and he never got involved in the daily operations of the group. We laughingly used to call our resident witchdoctor and he lived in a glass front, pre-fab structure at the top of the valley, which was once a thriving retail outlet known as the Rainbow Shop. Often when the conversation became related to things environmental he'd snap out of his normally lighthearted mood and declare in a firm voice "if humans truly wanted to save the planet then they would live as the 'Great Spirit' has decreed". Yirka, Caz and I were mates from the old days around the cross and from time to time we would share comical tales late in the chilly Blue Mountains night. So as not to disturb the sleeping children we used to congregate on a tree level balcony with possums hopping around us and our conversations were generally spiced with hydroponic buds and semi frozen vodka. For the briefest of moments Caz would shed the role of the benevolent group commander and laugh along with the poorboys. The pressures of life had taken their toll of late and it was good to see him getting loose and grooving with the lads.

The refinancing deal silenced the bank for a while but the Captain and the organisation still had looming debts which threatened to send us to the wall. Caz was open to any idea that might bring in a substantial windfall, so it wasn't too hard to convince him the Song Quest project should be further developed. I went on to explain how three milk crates full of studio dubs had been donated to the project through the years and I had recently stumbled upon the names and contact numbers of all of the contributors. All that was needed was a written agreement from the artists that they would give fifty percent of their royalties to a benefit fund who's aim it was to purchase the property as a public environment fascility. If one or more of their songs did well on the international charts it could very well have cleared all of the Planet savers debts and spawned an independent label based on social and environmental themes. Caz was all for the idea and he even dipped into his dwindling reserves to finance a digital audio recorder for the project.

I spent the next two months or so dubbing assorted piles of cassettes onto digital tape then I put together a written catalogue of their contents. At the end of my labours there was enough recorded material for nine albums including children's productions with environmental themes. I eventually narrowed the list down to a selection of twelve songs which I considered the very best in the collection. They formed a holistic but gutsy mix of folk songs with solid vocal harmonies and a wealth of poetry for the soul. It didn't take long before I started to imagine the songs being performed by the likes of Sting, Joe Cocker, Bette Midler and a host of other international stars I'd crossed path's with. The name of our musical enterprise evolved to become the 'Songs For Survival Project' which seemed a most appropriate title as the twentieth century drew to a close. The new name implied more than just a benefit album and a little stage light popped on above my head as I pondered a celebrity concert grand in scale. The combined album and concert fantasy opened up a whole new dimension of wild imaginings and that's when it hit me to create a time capsule and send the songs off into the future. An internet web site went into the early planning stages which would see the environmental messages of our younger subscribers shared at an unearthing concert on some far off and distant day.

The Songs For Survival Project would live on through history and humanity would be just that little bit wiser as it takes another thousand year leap into the future. My head was buzzing with excitement and I had the best bout of creative frenzy I think I'll ever know. I jumped straight on the captain's Macintosh computer and produced a step by step plan describing the project in detail. I proposed that the time capsule would be a giant seed which was forged from recycled aluminium and it would contain a solar powered, digital hi fi. 'The Songs For Survival Album' would be played at the unearthing ceremony and in conjunction a cast of headliners would perform them at a concert on the steps of the Sydney Opera House. The date that was assigned to the digging up of the capsule was 2069 which would mark the hundred year anniversary of the original 'Summer of Love'. I felt like I was being guided in my daily labours by the 'Great Spirit of Creation' Yirka always spoke of. Everything was fitting so perfectly into place. Through my involvement with the music industry I had acquired all of the necessary experience to make the benefit album and concerts a success and it felt like the most noble endeavour I could ever donate my time to. The Message to the future web site had the potential to act as an ongoing promotional lever for the Planet Savers music and as luck would have it for my own batch of environmental songs as well. Every available second outside of the Songs For Survival project was spent compiling my recordings into a final collection format. I eventually ended up with three albums worth of material which covered everything from traditional folk and the blues, to message related stuff and stupid old love songs. My Eco-inspired material was included in the list of Songs For Survival contributions which would hopefully rise to the top of the charts and bring great rewards to us all.

In the weeks leading up to the New Millennium I did a few trips from the mountains into Kings Cross to check out the old haunts and re-immense myself in the Sydney music scene. I ventured into most of the clubs where record company guys used to hang out to see if they were still around and as it happened some of them were. So was everything else that goes with end of year music industry parties and before long I was buzzing around to all of the best events just like in the old days. I reconnected with some of my old roadie mates from the Annandale studio who were unloading a PA in the back lane entrance of a Kings cross dive. The lads had established squats in a large house at Stanmore and they allowed me to use it as my Sydney base whenever I was in town. The crew were all dealing speed and it wasn't long before I was hopping into unending lines with them. The house was a non stop party zone which spilled into the pubs and clubs and turned my shell shocked metabolism on it's lazy arse. I accompanied the hell raising roadies to most of their inner city gigs and assisted them with the stage gear to get in free.

Even though I wasn't paying any rent in the mountains I found that my pension payments were barely adequate to keep up with the excesses of expensive nightlife fun and games. To avoid appearing the poor cousin I brokered the sale of a six pound haul of grass to some Maoris that I knew in Bondi. This transaction was just the first in a series of weekly orders which meant I could stand at the bar and shout rounds with the lads and not have to worry about the next friggin meal. The pre-millennium silly season was in full swing and the clubs were buzzing with energy in the closing scenes of the twentieth century. Techno music had replaced more traditional rock venues throughout the inner city which meant that ecstasy was easier to acquire than a drink of beer at the bar. On the frenzied, flashing dance floor at Kinsellas I introduced an old pot peddling colleague to a bloke who used to work at the Pussycat. Our informal little meeting led to a bulk transaction of ecstasy tablets with a street value of nearly a quarter of a million bucks. I received a healthy commission for my efforts and I didn't have to touch a single pill.

After the deal had gone through I purchased twenty of the tablets from my long established contact at cost price. I dropped a couple of the tabs with the roadies at a party we attended in Balmain and who should be the hostess but Sylvia from the Neon Farmboy days. She had recently broken it off with some bloke or other which left lots of room for touchy, smoochy interplay between us. The last of my eccies were distributed among Sylvia and her girlfriends then they paired off with the roadies to dance until the next morning. The New Millennium celebrations in Darling Harbour saw Sylvia and I falling all over each other laughing just like in the old days when we were working together in the band.

Our sudden re-connection triggered a silly season fling that was just as mischievous and thrill seeking as ever. Before the party aids got the better of me I managed to take in the sets that were performed by Jimmy Barnes and Paul Kelly who were headliners at the gig. It was reassuring to know that those long standing music industry 'Bad Boys' can still get a gig among all of that squeaky clean, Yuletide bullshit.



Jimmy and I used to live just up the road from each other in Elizabeth when we were both denim clad, teenage louts. We didn't know each other back then and the first time I ever met him was at a Cold Chisel gig in the infamous Shandon Hotel. During the break I was leaning on my car bonnet with some of the lads and Jimmy came over to join our group. As he sucked on a beer and chuckled with the lads he expressed his annoyance with some dumb chick in the front row who wouldn't stop grabbing his ankles. Our Rock and Roll wildman cheered up considerably when we pointed out the car belonging to the little pest. It was parked just a couple along from my own. In the spirit of stoned, delinquent mischief Jimmy scurried over to the girls car and ripped off the black plastic rear window slats. He concealed them just behind the front wheels of the girls car and after the gig he made a special point of coming outside to watch her drive off over them. Jimmy howled into the night sky with the rest of us as she flattened the window fixture then he got one of his roadies to fix us all up with free cans of beer.

'Oh ya! Jimmy'

On January the third 2000 I woke up in Sylvia's North Sydney apartment ready to get back to work. My post millennium hangover had subsided enough that I could kiss the girl a non-committal goodbye and make my way back to the mountains carrying a load of newly acquired contacts in my briefcase. Apparently in the time I was away from the music scene many of the old crew had come up the ladder and now they held directors positions with some of the major labels. Among our frantic festivities no specific meetings were arranged for the new year, but the exchange of business cards was a regular feature at the bar. Most agreed that the new genre I was proposing had potential if the songs were as good as I said they were. They might I was told even be able to cross over from the folk marketplace to the mainstream arena.

I figured the tricky part was going to be striking up a deal where the first twelve songs could be re-recorded at the expense of a record company and all of the others would be released by 'The Songs for Survival' Independent label. In the first days of the new millenium the Songs for Survival catalogue and it's accompanying promotional outline became hard copy and the recorded material was transferred from Dat tape onto compact disks. My own music package was looking just as presentable and I couldn't wait to kick off the new century by following through on the connections I had made.

On some of my excursions from the mountains to Sydney I managed to bump into a few of my old busking acquaintances at their various kerbside gigs. I was interested to see if there were enough studio wise players around to form a band just in case the offers started rolling in. Merv Mega-star was still there in his same old spot under the neon lit Coke sign and he was giving the audience his usual brand of tongue in cheek humour. Heavy electrified guitar riffs punctuated a witty and streetwise dose of verbal gymnastics, then he exploded into his best known song, ... 'She's in love with a vacuum cleaner'. Merv is the Iggy Pop'esque alter ego of Peter Bergen who is a great guitarist, drummer and harmonica player. I thought perhaps if a record company were to sign me for an album deal I could get him to give up centre stage for a while and become a support musician in my group. Teiwi Richards is another seasoned veteran of that dirty old street and he hails from the original occupation of Bondi by the Maoris. He's an unbelievably talented rhythm guitarist and singer and when I spotted him he was entertaining a group of Japanese tourists beside the fountain near the cop shop. We sang a few of the old favourites for the tourists and before I knew it I was time warping back the hay day of our busking careers.

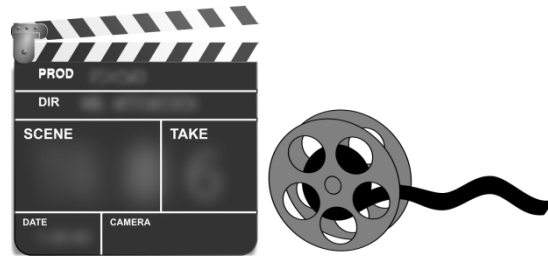
Teiwi is one of the very few vocalists who has ever reduced me to tears. He plays an impeccable style of rhythm guitar and his soulful lead solos are up there with the very best of them. As I met up with the old busking crew in the same setting we had originally met it occurred to me that the Cross never really changes from one decade to the next. The characters just seem to die out or move on and they are replaced by others of the same pedigree in the unfolding cabaret of the street. BJ my old busking watchdog had gone to live somewhere out near Bathurst and Frankie the strip club owner brought a tourist chalet some place up in the snow. The only nightclub doorman I knew in the new environment was Moose the fun loving, thrash punk kick boxer who I used to share a flat with in Bondi. He and I were part of the Kings Cross nightclub clan throughout the eighties and we raged hard with some of the toughest men in the business.

Moose got me into the dance club he was guarding which just happened to be the swanked up, latest evolution of the old Kardomha Cafe. The place had long since been handed over to the wealthy techno crowd and it was no longer the throbbing den of outlaws we had once known. I shared a couple of drinks and classic dope dealing yarns with Moose during his break then I took a final stroll down the miracle mile and caught the last train back to the mountains.

All the footage we needed for 'The voice of the people' documentary was in the can so the first few weeks of the new year were spent offline editing the master tapes and building a video catalogue. Recorded material from the Song Quest catalogue was dubbed over the final edited production and it turned into an hour long presentation ideal for release on SBS or the ABC. When it came time to digitally enhance the masters Roger and I found that our boardroom conspirators had finally got their way. No funds were forthcoming for the project to go to completion and the thing still sits gathering dust among the Captains archives. This level of disunited inefficiency was typical of how things were with the Planet Savers and I shudder to imagine how many other worthwhile endeavours have suffered the same fate. The drafting of my memoirs came to take precedence over everything during the most of 2000.

My involvement with the daily operations of the Planet savers was reduced to token contributions because I had discovered the art of painting with words and it was all I wanted to do. Caz was very understanding of my situation and the only time I really saw him was when he popped down to the dome to share a joint and have a yarn. His latest marketing innovation was a thing called 'Mind Vitamins' which was a range of decorative fridge magnets and stickers displaying classic gems of wisdom. Some of the neatly scrolled little truisms were well suited to the product but others were fluffy, new age clap trap which held little significance in the real crisis afflicted world.

The most appropriate I thought and my favourite among his catalogue of eternal truths was a thing that said, ... 'The only difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary is that little bit extra'. Our dear Captain was in a debt ridden mess but he was totally convinced that his latest creation was going to save the day. As the THC settled on his security threatened consciousness he went into excitable raves about how his product was going to be sitting on every fridge on the planet within twelve months. The Wisdom Gardens were due to go back on the open market in less than three weeks if he didn't cough up thirty thousand dollars and his family had flatly refused to throw away another red cent. Any test of Non-Attachment I may have experienced seemed small in comparison to the Captains lot except perhaps for the loss of Rufus. I allowed him to go to wishful thinking extremes in my presence but at every turn I reminded him of the potential earning power of the songs. When he had left the dome I jotted down some notes about his place in my memoirs then I dived like a feeding gull back into the sea of literary ideas.



CHAPTER SEVEN

DREAMS

Dreams! Hell yeah! My vote is yes indeed please for dreams. A very intrusive, red flashing light and a noisy alarm signal from my bladder has just snapped me out of a very lucid experience where I was at the top of a high escarpment with a long smooth slope going down to a large flat area like an expansive salt pan. Matt Damon and his twin brother were cheering me on as I clawed at the outside cockpit roof of a big old commercial air liner that was banking pilotless and of it's own accord ever closer to the edge of the slope. As it listed and began to lean over I did a Jason Bourne'esque bonnet roll and landed on my feet beside them on the tarmac. The three of us watched silently at first as the jet liner rolled down the slope then "Oh! Yeahs!" and "go baby!" rang out from the twins. Almost at the bottom of the slope the plane caught a sudden thermal gust and lifted away with a powerful yet graceful fluttering of the by now flexible wings then it made a turn and flattened out towards a bright orange and crimson sunset. Following this the three of us were instantly transported in a matrix like reality shift into the library of an old mansion where we continued to laugh and converse about the featherless flight of the airliner. There were others in the library who I somehow recognised from a past experience that involved them, the Damon brothers and myself. That's the point at which I had to get up and go to the toilet as I was again reality shifted from the dream to an almost foetal position on my bed. Wow! Now as I wipe sleep from my eyes and try to stop yawning I am also trying to remember more details from the dream, but's like a nineteen twenties movie that's reached the end of the spool and is flickering to a close. It occurs to me that this is the very first time I have captured a dream in words shortly after waking.

I'm thinking my recent increase in vivid lucid dreaming has something to do with the new combination of opiates I've been experimenting with. I've worked out that two 50mg Tramadol slow release capsules taken at the same time with 300mg of Lyrica is better to get me to off sleep than a single Temazapan sleeping tablet. I most often pop them at days end after dinner when I'm watching the news. As a rule I generally wake up after my cat nap about Nine pm or so and I work on the book until daybreak. Many of the dreams I've been having lately feature now passed on friends like Morty, Elizabeth and Emu but quite often I am visited by well known movie stars and music celebrities as well. We often engage in long, deep conversations and action packed escapades that I'm sure have some meaning among the machinations of my ever active subconscious mind. I'm going to really make an effort from now on to snap myself out of slumber mode so I can capture more of my dreams in words. So by this stage in the game I've successfully managed to turn failure into an art form and I'm pretty much ready for anything the experiential playground can dish up.

BEING HERE STILL

The music industry commenced it's operations for 2000 and I was incapable of chasing any kind of record deal because I was suddenly confronted with the reality that I had to find a new home. In the end things became so chaotic and out of control at the Wisdom Gardens that I couldn't stay focussed on a thing I had to do. In light of the captain's financial pressures it distinctly felt like I was taking advantage of a comrade in his hour of need. My two most practical options were to return to Byron Bay and try to secure a studio at the Epicentre or move back to Port Stephens where I could set up my base on one of the properties belonging to Quick Bucks. The latter got my vote as it was closer to Sydney and besides I don't really want to go and live back in the Northern Rivers until I can at least afford a deposit on some land. Young William came to the rescue and helped to transport my belongings to Port Stephens in his sparkling new Toyota van.

Tootsy was pregnant with her second litter and it was a fingers crossed affair to complete the five hour journey without her dropping puppies all over Wills new vehicle. We made it to the bay without any birthing incidents and unloaded my gear into a waiting caravan beside Buck's swampland shack. Buck was the guy who first introduced me to the Port Stephens area about twenty years ago. I was busking in the cross with a young bloke who didn't really know how to play the song I wanted to sing. Buck was in the audience that night and he managed to entice the guitar away from the other player.

We did a much applauded version of 'Riders on the storm' then he wandered off into the crowded street. I was so impressed by his playing that I chased him through the cross to find out who he was. As they say the rest is pretty much history. I ended up singing lead vocals in his fifty's revival band that was called, 'A little Dab'll Do Ya' and Shoal Bay the town in which he lived became my regular holiday destination from the rat race of Sydney.

In the days that followed our arrival in Port Stephens Toot's gave birth to nine squirming little balls of fun which inspired me to construct a cyclone wire fence around the perimeter of the van. Buck's property is located in densely infested mosquito territory, so the next job on my list was to fix the fly screens on his battered old caravan and construct a mozzie net extension for the dogs. Within a week I was pretty well established and everything was perfect except for one thing. It was the height of the mudcrab season amid the sparkling waters of Tilligerry creek and my boat was still sitting in storage at Brunswick Heads. Unable to resist the urge any longer I used the bulk of my next pension payment to hire a pantec truck and did a northbound trip to retrieve my boat and other assorted gear. As I have come to expect thieves had been through my belongings in my absence and they walked off with a substantial haul. The boat and outboard motor were left untouched however along with the oars and other such stuff. I loaded what remained of my gear into the truck and hit the road amid melancholy reflections of Rufus and the time we had spent together in that town. Not far from Taylors Beach I found a fantastic secluded inlet on one of my many hikes through the wetlands with Toots. The inaccessible mangrove setting became a permanent mooring for the boat and it was less than twenty minutes from the caravan by pushbike. It was great to be out fishing again after many cold months in the mountains and I knew in my deepest being that I had made the right choice to drop anchor in Port Stephens. I stayed in Buck's caravan for about ten months but the mosquito and tick problem ensured that I always had an eye open for a better location. With the assistance of another long standing Bay crew mate I eventually moved out of the swamp and occupied a disused beachhouse that sits right next door to old Sid's place in Shoal Bay.

I lived there rent free for more than twelve months before the landowner got wind of my presence and called in the law to kick me out. That's when Sid offered me the use of his back shed and I have been here ever since. In the time since first I commenced the opening chapters our old sea captain Sid has slipped into the advanced stages of dementia. Most of the time he can't remember what he had for breakfast, let alone the simplistic threads of our conversations. He can still attend to his daily chores around the caravan but the ravages of time are causing his once solid frame to become more frail and feeble by the day. He is in a rapid decline and don't think it will be long before he requires full time nursing.

Sid has relatives scattered all over the continent who seldom ever come to visit but I should imagine his death will bring them swarming. In the time that I have been here not one of his five children have made enquiries about his health or offered any assistance with his welfare. The money grabbing bastards are probably waiting for him to draw his last breath like buzzards on a branch so they can cash in on the property. At great strain to my sanity and communication skills I have managed to extract a phone number out of the old boy which belongs to the oldest of his sons. He lives somewhere up in Queensland and I've got my fingers crossed that he comes to my aid if the skipper suddenly plunges into some kind of unreachable catatonic state. For the most part Sid's incoherent ramblings have been the only human contact I have had since I have lived in Shoal bay, other than the odd out of the blue phone calls from Mort and Young William.

My existence has been pretty much devoid of human complications and that's exactly how it has to be, if I am to remain sane and leave an artistic legacy in the world. Mostly unhindered by the shackles of normal life I am able to devote my full attention to creative pursuits and any unoccupied moments I may have are spent reflecting on the life I have lived. I guess middle age is the time when most men find themselves pushing the rewind button on the movie in which they have starred. They either see themselves as a hero on some imaginary silver screen, or an inconsequential extra in a film that nobody went to see. I choose to perceive of my own being as that of an eternal spirit, who is dressed in a temporary costume of flesh and can traverse the inter-dimensional realms of the cosmos. As best I can imagine, the purpose of my own existence apart from the inevitable gene pool duties is the quest for wisdom. The chance of having a face to face meeting with the artist who created me would be quite a truly novel event as well. To embrace the path of an art monk I have concluded that a man must shake off all worldly attachments and that includes the all consuming quest to find a feminine counterpart in the world.

With the decline of physical strength, youthful looks and virility I have started reflecting on my encounters with the fairer sex through the years. A montage of happy snaps is currently taking shape on the studio wall and it consists of photographs of all my past loves. Starting with early shots of Anna Maria and Joy in Adelaide the photographic display features happy times with Anne Charline, Elizabeth and Alicia. It contains numerous others I have not mentioned and concludes with a blurred shot of Sylvia and I dancing and laughing at the New millennium celebrations. Like notches on Valentino's bedpost the pictures are a visual anthology of my adult life and they are a constant reminder that I knew how to woo them in my prime. I guess I should be grateful for the assorted, romantic experimentations I have had since first my balls dropped and all I can say about love is ...'I'm in love with the idea of it'.



'EINI, MEANI, MINEY, MO!'

That odd phenomenon we describe as 'Love' is the illusion of infinite euphoria by which our biology lures us into the nurturing of a new generation. The only thing that separates a life of freedom from the slog of a family routine is a group of molecular troublemakers that you can look up in any high school biology book. After much internal debate I have concluded that after Lizzy, Anne Charline was probably the next contender in line in my quest to find the perfect partner. In our short three months together we never had a serious argument due to her limited English and the fact we lived on opposite sides of the globe ensured that we would never be subject to post honeymoon friction. If that sounds like an arrogant and insensitive perspective on human relations, then I stand guilty as charged and sweet memories are all I deserve. When you are young and caught in the grip of chemically induced delirium nothing else matters but getting your genitalia wet and your ego pampered by as many lovers as you can snare.

Talk about chance. A couple of days ago I was dutifully banging away on the computer and trying to convince myself that love is futile, when a new reality suddenly presented itself. This new twist in my story now threatens to make the whole 'Art Monk' rave sound like the discontented ramblings of some socially alienated jerk, who is too lazy to get off his arse and find himself a root. A woman with whom I had a quite in depth affair at the Wisdom Gardens decided to call me up out of the blue. The sexual innuendos that were blurted forth in our initial phone conversation were such that I was inspired to jump on the first available train headed for the mountains. I woke up the following morning to warm coffee and a post coital smooching session, sufficient to convince me that nothing in the world is more powerful than the drive to get your rocks off.

My bed partners name is Robyn and it would seem that we have embarked on a second attempt at that illusive, holy grail of human relations. A sane and easy going relationship. Things should be a lot easier this time around because her young daughter 'Rosie' is sixteen with a boyfriend and this means that Robyn is less prone to the stresses of trying to appear like some kind of 'single parent supermum'. My present perspective on the rekindled romance is that it doesn't feel so much like I am back tracking, as I have been granted an opportunity to put the fruits of my experience into practice. In more intimate moments we talk about the importance of mutual respect and basic human friendship as the basis for any healthy partnership. Then we get down to the serious business of trying to locate the most sensitive little nooks and crannies of each others erogenous zones. With the reignition of the old flame between us I have decided to follow through on the plans I was making when we first met to have the 'Big V' and get my reproductive functions terminated. There are way too many children being born into the world and our fragile little home in the sky has been too severely plundered to support them all. Besides I want a relationship with a woman who is exploring her own potential outside the restrictions of motherhood. Someone who has performed her nurturing duties and wants to engage in a bit of post parental fun. Alas the hay day of my public notoriety has faded to distant, flickering memories. Just like the time worn photographs on my wall. Dreams of international success are but empty bubbles, floating in the still backwaters of my mind. I suppose by not achieving my dreams of Rock and Roll glory I avoided a life of pre-fabricated, public respectability and that brings a certain sense of contentment. The way I see things I was very lucky to have travelled the path I did because I got to fulfil my artistic ambitions as a singer/songwriter and an advocate of what is good in the world.

As I recount the crazy years I lived through the thing that most astounds me is the amazing chain of coincidental events that brought me in contact with those I knew and worked with. It seems the magical occurrences of my life continue to pop up and something just happened which offers a fine example of what I mean. I am amped up to the max at the moment as my story nears it's end and I struggle to get everything I wanted to say into print. As I have powered along with my work I have been listening to all of my techno compilation tapes as a kind of relaxation therapy. Just by chance I picked up a cassette produced by a fellow busker that I have not heard in ages. The name of the performer is India Bharti and he is a Shiva devotee who sings wild ancient chants and plays an assortment of home crafted instruments. At the very moment I placed the tape in the player my eye was caught by the miniature TV that I keep next to the computer. It was Billy Connolly's new show 'The World Tour of Australia' and he was doing a feature on India Bharti as he did his busking show in Circular Quay.

How fucking amazing is that? The coincidence is pretty spectacular in itself, but an equally mind blowing aspects is that Billy and I also knew each other in the early days. We met at the peak of the busking years while he was touring our fair shores and putting the population in stitches. The particular moment in which we crossed each others paths is probably as embarrassing as hell for Billy to reminisce on but I'm going to tell the story anyway, confident that he will forgive me.

'I hope I don't get sued for this'

I wasn't even out star hunting the night I stumbled upon Billy Connolly in Kings Cross. I was walking down Darlinghurst road on my way to the Piccadilly nightclub and I spotted our ever hilarious Scottish clown stretched out on the pavement next to a banjo strumming old guy with a sawn off leg. The mean spirited old fart regularly made it his practice to scream abuse at the audience if they didn't pay up but he was in a particularly good mood this night as Billy had dropped a twenty dollar note in his hat. As I arrived on the scene Billy was literally rolling in the gutter dressed up to the nines in expensive threads and cowboy boots. From a reclining position on the pavement he was declaring to the world that he was a, 'Famous Rock and Roll Celebrity' and I thought it's only a matter of time before some fast moving gutter snipe relieves him of his wallet. I reached down and helped him up in his paralytic stupor and arm in arm we staggered up the street towards the Sebel Town House. After breezing through security we arrived at his penthouse suite and he insisted that we have 'goodnight dinkies' but at that stage he was incapable of even finding the bar fridge. He crashed out after a final rendition of, "I'm a famous celebrity" and I left my name on a drink coaster beside his bed. The following night at the Capital theatre I was delighted to find that Billy had discovered the note and he had kindly left my name at the box office. I was escorted to the back stage area by an usherette and was greeted by Billy with a big hug as I entered his pre-performance environment. Now all sobered up and respectable he thanked me for escorting him home and I was staggered by the notion that he remembered a single thing about his drunken escapade. As we were speaking an irate American promoter interrupted our chat by declaring in less than hushed tones that Billy had, "No right to announce any late arrivals to the show". He said that it was a full house and there was absolutely nowhere for me to sit. Instantly Billy fired up and went into the same kind of vocal display we have all seen on our television screens.

He said, "Well if there's no fucking room for the man to sit down you poor excuse for a fucking entrapment, then he can stand right at the front of the goddamned stage as if he's my bodyguard". The promoter stormed off in a huff and I stood exactly where Billy had suggested, with the best front row position I ever could have wished for.

'Aye! Billy boy!'

While on the subject of highly strung individuals Morty popped in to look me up over the Christmas period that just passed. We spent a couple of days together getting out of it and going through some of the old songs, but it didn't quite feel the same as it has in days gone by. He was travelling in the company of a Latin performer known as 'Ho hey' who plays wonderful traditional tunes and can sketch a man's portrait in about three minutes flat. The likeness he captured of me was very good, but I was so badly hungover when they left that I forgot to get it photo-copied. The two were on their way to perform at the New Year's Eve celebrations in Byron Bay which offered far more excitement than I could ever imagine around my neck of the woods. I asked Morty if he could fit me in for the ride but the police were blitzing holiday road users and he was worried about getting busted with an unseatbelted passenger. Middle age it seems has made my once thrill seeking, delinquent partner think twice before running off on the next irresponsible adventure. I can remember a time when he hung out of my old Futura giving lip to some coppers at the lights while I had a kilo slab of imported hashish concealed in the boot. Another time while he was driving on the narrow winding roads up to Palm Beach I asked if he could slow down a bit and he began the most terrifying game of chicken I have ever experienced. He was gunning his old Morris convertible down through the slippery, mist engulfed bends while laughing his stupid head off and saying, "Does this scare you?, ... How about this?"

'FUCKHEAD!'

Having been so long away from any kind of live performance or busking activities the visit by Mort and Ho hey stirred dormant creative instincts which left me feeling restless and ill at ease. Since I began my life away from the busking trail I have been teaching myself to ignore the call of the street, but the occasional hot and steamy Friday night will find me wishing I could be entertaining a bustling street crowd. Sometimes as the weekend comes around I am tempted to jump on the first available bus to Sydney and look up my old players. Bright sunny Saturdays try to entice me away to sing in the marketplace but common sense always kicks in to remind me, you can't recapture golden moments. It doesn't do anything to subdue the knowledge, I've still got what it takes to impress an audience.

The legacy of my heady cocaine days is badly decaying teeth which has brought with it my first ever glimpse of introversion and self consciousness. I have got to such a point of withdrawal from human inter-reaction that I pretend to scratch my nose if ever I'm talking to the postman or shopkeeper. The thought of breaking into a public smile is absolutely out of the question. For three years or so I have been on a list awaiting free dental care and now at last my crumbling and smoke stained teeth are being removed. I am soon to have a sparkling new lower plate instead of horrible glaring gaps and this has increased my sense of personal confidence no end. When the new dentures are in place I'm going to get into some long awaited studio vocals and I'll hook up a video camera to see how they look. With a set of sparkling new choppers in my head I don't imagine it will be long before I am singing at every opportunity. I have recently isolated all of the best music beds from my recorded catalogue and the idea to build an act around them has become my main ambition in life. Once up and running the show would feature yours truly singing over the music beds through a portable amp set up. It would be a karioki type of affair with original material instead of the usual cover versions. If my dream of coming out of retirement reaches fruition I might even be able to sell a few CDs containing my songs.

My gardening efforts in the courtyard are going from strength to strength as I master the art of growing organic produce. Last years harvest of corn, pumpkins, spuds and tomatoes probably wouldn't have got us through a nuclear winter, but they kept us well fed for about three months. Organic gardening is great in theory but the hands on application is not easy work at all. As the first warm days of spring blessed the land my corn and pumpkin crops were invaded by a host of leaf gnawing insects and rodents. Any form of chemical was out of the question so I had to virtually watch the plants grow to maturity and remove any unwanted bugs with my fingers. My well seasoned respect for the bio-diversity of life meant I couldn't just kill every caterpillar I found, so I ended up keeping them in a plate glass terrarium that I picked up at the re-cycle depot. I laid some river pebbles and soil in the bottom of the mirrored insect enclosure and they supported newly transferred pumpkin seedlings for the growing population to feed on. In time little cocoons started appearing all around the glass as my insect guests went into their pupa stage. Before I knew it I was bidding newly emerged butterflies a fond farewell as they flew off to lay their eggs on my tomatoes.

'Isn't it grand Nature Lovers?'

I've been pondering the concept of death and rebirth a fair bit lately. One of the very few visitors I have received in Shoal Bay was a guy from Tasmania called Big Jim. Jim was a H.E.M.P. Activist who spent most of his time promoting non THC cannabis fibre for commercial use. He used to pop in and see me from time to time on his way through to Nimbin and when he did he would always pull out some potent Tasmanian heads. Last week I was informed by a mutual friend that he had suddenly up and died. Just like that he was only Fifty five. Apparently Big Jim was just sitting around in a lounge chair packing a bong and his ticker stopped. I turn forty five in August so that makes him almost ten years older than me. Christ I had better get cracking on releasing some albums and the publication of this book. I am probably in a higher risk bracket than Jim was because I like everything that's supposed to be bad for you. I go through ciggies and pot like a smokehouse chimney and I absorb alcohol like a dry sponge.

I can't resist all of those special treats that the heart attack lobby has condemned and I pray that I am sipping on a double Jack Daniels as I draw my last breath. As I ponder my own departure from the earth my imagination goes completely haywire trying to visualise a possible hereafter. Logic tells me that any alternative dimension to life which could host a bodyless consciousness would have to be created in part by that very intelligence. The best I can speculate is that an afterlife might exist for those who can create it and then imagine themselves there. It's either that or 'Lights out forever' so I'm going to hedge my bet both ways. More than ever I'm going to live each moment as if it were my very last. I'll strengthen my sense of appreciation with each breath and I will sacrifice my gratitude to the stars for every nano-second I have wasted. I was so shaken by Jim's death that I drafted a last will and testament and hung it up at the back door of my shack. If I suddenly departed my cosy recliner for the great unknown at least those who found me would have some family contact details to work with. In the will I bequeathed all my worldly possessions and any future royalty payments to my daughters Kianna and Miranda. They haven't seen their old man for so long it hurts but I guess that's the price you pay for being allergic to emotional pain. Who knows? They might be able to make some use of my music and computer equipment. Miranda is fourteen and she attends a school for gifted children in Sydney. Kianna is seven and already she has displayed the first signs of an inherent creative drive. Perhaps as they are rummaging through the remnants of my life they will stumble upon those painfully honest songs I wrote for their mothers.



MY DAUGHTERS MIRANDA AND KIANNA

I know I shouldn't be so concerned about life and death matters because in a technical sense I have already died. When last I was a resident of Byron Bay I had the good fortune to gain access to a fully equipped office right in the middle of town. The office was being rented by a local Film Producer called Peter Simon who was a good friend of mine. I used to work on his computer late in the night then I would just lay my bedroll out on the floor when it was time to sleep. The office was in a building that was also occupied by the regional Newspaper. A reporter from the newspaper had recently been killed in a car crash and based on a description of what he looked like the word started circulating that it was me. Around the same time I had secured some space on a property in the hills near Mullumbimby, so I had stopped being such a regular feature around Byron. The Street people knew I was using the office and they must have concluded that since I hadn't been around it must have been me.

Word of my sad departure spread quickly throughout the Northern rivers and it was next to emerge in Sydney via the 'Brackets and Jam' folk music collective. This is a weekly gathering of folkies I regularly used to perform with. On my next visit to Sydney everyone I connected with thought they were talking to a ghost. Apparently the phones ran hot as news of my continued existence was shared among my network of friends. You know folks it's hard to be a hermit when you are this bloody popular.

For those who have spent time at the 'Piccolo Bar' in Kings Cross it damn well serves you right. 'Vittorio the Magnificent' as I call him is the Gay and extremely animated proprietor of this world renowned establishment. Through the years Vito has put up with hell from me as I learned the art of controlling an abnormally inflated ego. Most of the time myself and the other buskers would hit the Piccolo after our shows and all it would take was a puff on some weed or hash to get me chattering like a know it all, two bob watch. Not too long before my untimely death was announced Young William had been on Vito's case for taking my picture down off the wall.



MY ENVIRONMENTAL SGT. PEPPERS PERIOD WITH ALANA IN THE PICCOLO

It was situated among the cream of Sydney's underground Cabaret performers with some great shots of Jeannie Lewis, Wendy Saddington, Reg Livermore and others. When next I poked my head in the door of Vito's little coffee shop he was a lot sterner than his normal short tempered self. I assumed it was because of the photograph thing with Will but that wasn't it. The poor little powder puff thought that I had gone to Buskers heaven and it was simply too much for him to cope with. He said, "Aren't you supposed to be dead, ... you silly boy?" in a dry, yet mildly comical way. He was noticeably shaken by my presence. I suspect that Vito had expressed more personal grief at my passing than he would like to let on and when he found out it was a big hoax he had little choice but to feel like a real, ... *'Shpleeack!'*

'LIFE IS A CABARET OLD CHUM COME TO THE CABARET'

When everyone who knows you thinks you are dead and gone it can be quite a refreshing experience and it can provide a unique opportunity to reinvent yourself. It's as if my life began again when the absurdity of my personal 'Cosmic Joke' was revealed to me. After I died and was resurrected in the hearts and minds of my friends I felt like Jesus Christ dancing the watusi on New Years Eve. I think it says in the bible somewhere that, ...

'A man must lose his life so that he may find it'

There's another which says, ... ***'Only as a child can you enter ,...***

the kingdom of heaven'

I must have been doing something right because in a symbolic sense I have lost my life and regained it. As hard as I try I can't seem to grow up, so I guess I qualify for entry through the pearly gates.

'The Kingdom of Heaven is Within'

This little gem holds very special meaning for me as it is a poetic description of the meditative and totally atoned state of mind that comes with artistic satisfaction. That's the feeling I am experiencing at this very moment.

'Om ... Gaia'

HERE

ITS HERE I POUR MY HEART OUT
AS I REACH FOR THE WISDOM OF DREAMS
WHERE I SWIM THE ILLUSIVE BYWAYS
OF THE NEVER ENDING STREAM
EVERYTHING IS BEAUTY AND HOLY FOR ALL TO BEHOLD
THE FRAGRANCE OF LIFE BRINGS THE KISS OF EXISTENCE
AS HEAVEN SPACE UNFOLDS
COME TO THE JOURNEY OF LEARNING
FROM EVERY DIMENSION OF LOVE
OPEN YOUR MIND LET YOUR SPIRIT FLY
AND EXPLORE YOUR DESIRES FROM ABOVE
I HEREBY SUBMIT MY VISION AS THAT BEFORE YOUR EYES
FOCUS YOUR PUPILS UPON THE EARTH
OVER MOUNTAINS AND TO THE SKY
THERE TO BEHOLD THE FLAME OF PERFECTION
RADIANT FINGERS TOUCH BLOSSOMS OF GRACE
WARM AND EVASIVE LIKE GLANCING THROUGH A CRYSTAL
YET SOFT AS THE BREEZE UPON YOUR FACE

CHAPTER EIGHT

Christmas! Shmish!'Shmash!

(THE TITLE IS MY TWIST ON,... 'BAAH! HUMBUG')

You say that it's Christmas, So what have you done?

Besides what ghost? Well Chrissy time for me ain't generally no big family event. Maybe a few electronic festive season well wishes will be pinged off as I gorge myself on choccies from the last dumpster dive and sip on my coffee, which I gave an extra hefty slug of Captain Morgans rum. The big event of my day is the fact I achieved the highly physical objective I set for myself yesterday I made it my mission to prepare for a camping holiday like every other lucky bastard does in the holiday season. A few days ago I scored a ship shape, barely used, double canvased swag down at the charity bins and the thick roll up mattress inside it looked promising for a reasonable nights shut eye. With the help of Joey my care worker I dismantled my normal bed and in it's place we stretched out the swag on the carpeted floor. Just as I had hoped I was able to knock out enough **zzzzz!'s** to satisfy and my lower back was no worse for wear. Joe has clocked off for Christmas so the big event I referred to was the fact I was able to roll up the swag and re-assemble my bed base and mattress unassisted. Now the swag has been satisfactorily road tested my objective in the next few days is to assemble the required components and load up the mobility scooter and sack trolley trailer with all I will need for the trip down to the water. The spot where I want to launch the boat is about six clicks away as the crow flies from my front door. My load will include the rolled up inflatable and an outboard motor, the swag, a tarp and, insect netting, butane cooker, esky filled with booze and food and my fishing gear. The last time I camped out in the open was about six years ago on the night before I occupied my first housing unit in Brookvale. That's the reason this is such a big deal for me because it signifies the fact I am still physically able to maintain a water based, independent reality if the whole global shitstorm goes to the dogs. The new year will see the return of my ongoing battle against eviction and in any case for the whole time I have been in this government provided comfort zone I've felt as vulnerable as a shag on a rock. Just last week I had some shifty eyed prick outside my security door at 7.30 am claiming to be a property maintenance inspector. When I told him it was too early and to 'Fuck off' he looked like a bank robber who's just been told his accomplice has done a runner with all of the cash. I foiled a home invasion with obscene language and threatening gestures and my loaded and cocked speargun has been on the ready near the front door ever since it happened.



THE RED LIGHT AREA OF HOLLYWOOD

It was like most other September nights in the bay, muggy with a slight breeze coming off the water. I stirred from my slumber in the shed I had converted into a live in recording studio at the rear of Sid's place in Shoal Bay and I hit the bedside light. I fired up a ciggie as I normally do when I wake up full of beans in the wee small hours, then I switched on the portable, twelve volt powered television beside my bed. As the miniature black and white screen lit up the room the first image to hit my waking brain was the first plane penetrating the world trade centre towers. The footage was 'American breaking news' so it received all the attention I could muster as I put the coffee on. I was still wiping crusty shards of sleep from my eyes and piecing together the fact it was a terrorist attack when the second plane found it's target. Talk about waking up with a bang. I knew what I was seeing was big and it was all happening so fast my waking reality took on a 'Twilight zone'ish, almost surrealistic feel. I didn't know it at the time, but in those drowsy, pre dawn moments I was witness not only a significant shift in human evolution but a personal transition from the relatively safe and stable world I had known to the uncertainty and dread of 'post nine eleven consciousness'.

An endless stream of news broadcasts about the attacks and the human tragedies to follow went on to dominate the media and peoples thoughts bringing the echo of blood hunting wolves howling and scratching at the door. Even in the largely apathetic seaside township of Shoal Bay people were engaging in serious conversations down at the local about how the event might change their world. Nine eleven was to send shock waves across the globe that I am certain will reverberate for generations to come. I sensed the first impact of those waves at a deep, instinctive level and I knew something had been irreversibly altered within my being. Two key threat factors now dominated my thoughts and they made me question how safe I was in my present reality. News of terrorist attacks at the very heart of the free world and ever increasing warnings about drought and climate change were to cause a significant shift in my perceptions of the life support system I currently inhabited. It triggered a survival instinct similar the one I experienced in hospital and it snapped me out of complacency into absolute self preservation mode.



I had been sitting pretty in my twenty dollar a week rental agreement with the old fisherman, but something was telling me I should be living closer to the water. If there was any major rise in sea levels or possible Islamic threats within Australia I would stand a far better chance of survival living at a safe distance from society. The idea of spending the remainder of my life dependent on grid power and tap water became less sustainable the more I thought about it, so I made a sincere resolution to create a life raft for my personal survival and vowed I would make self sustainability my dominant life's dedication. It's uncanny how minor coincidences can relate perfectly to changes you are experiencing at that particular point in time. As they interface the two factors can somehow ignite a guiding beacon that shines a light on a doorway you hadn't seen before. That's exactly how it was for me just before I moved out of shoal Bay. The holiday units on Sid's property were transformed from their normal slow moving rate of holiday season occupation to a throbbing party zone filled with thrill seeking, young backpackers. The newly constructed resort across the road took a permeant lease on the upper and lower floors of the apartments to accommodate the kids and when they weren't working their shifts they raised hell as young adventurers do when they are running free in the world. My quiet little existence in the bay was suddenly turned on it's lazy arse. The young blood grooving around the place brought with them a vibe I hadn't felt since I was in Byron Bay and their arrival caused the travel bug within me to stir. The travelling companion who lives down my pants began to stir as well when scantily clad young babes flitted and giggled around me. It was as if my daily reality had become re-festivalized in a beautiful invasion of vibrant young spirits.



ALL THE FINE YOUNG TRAVELLERS

It didn't take long before our new neighbours detected pot smoke billowing from my corner of the property and they started making enquiries. Within just a few short days I was supplying the whole crew and my economic reality took a swan dive into increased indulgence. Not wanting to appear like some kind of money grabbing dealer in the eyes of the crew I churned most of my profits from the pot transactions back into the collective flow. Whenever the kids were having parties in the apartments I would roll up with bottles of whisky and bowls of weed for the whole rowdy gathering to share. Among the more alpha male contenders in the group there was a cool, young cat called Ben who came from up state New York and he was here on a three month working visa. Ben was an artist who after receiving my permission performed an art attack on any flat surface he could find in the courtyard around the shed. With old buckets of paint he unearthed from the storeroom his creativity was unleashed from early morning till well after dark. As he laboured tirelessly on the murals we exchanged notes about the world and a lasting bond was formed. After he had performed the final brush stroke for the day we would sit around my campfire drinking beer and rum and the conversations would continue. Often his young companions would join us to play their guitars and sing ever so sweetly into the Shoal Bay night.

In the time I lived with Sid he treated me like any ships captain would relate to a common deckhand and I savoured every moment with him like I had been granted special passage into the sea faring life. When he was firing orders at me each day it provided him with a sense of purpose and kept the early stages of his dementia at bay. There were a couple of brothers living in the village who were fishermen friends of Sid's and they would often drop off a bucket or two of freshly caught fish. This pair of evolutionary throwbacks were not the brightest lights on the ocean and even if they hadn't been out fishing for days they still carried with them a putrid, fishy smell. The 'Smelly undies brothers' as I had privately nicknamed them also did maintenance work around the holiday units when they weren't out catching fish. I knew the brothers had invested money in the renovation of the units and it came as no surprise that my presence represented a threat to their plans. I overheard a secretive conversation that gave the first hint they were conspiring to have the old boy certified as incapable. They wanted to stick him in a retirement home and claim full ownership of the property which had suddenly escalated in value with the building of the resort. Out of the blue one night at the Country club bar the brothers informed me that 'Old Sid' was too senile to manage the holiday units anymore and they were taking over the job. I was told that I had to pack up my gear and get out within two weeks because the shed was going to be demolished to make way for a carpark. The Christmas and new year period was just around the corner so I requested an extension on the two weeks eviction notice I'd been given. The brothers became hostile and started making half pissed threats about using me as bait in their crap pots if I didn't get out.

***'I GUESS A MAN DESERVES ALL HE GETS
WHEN HE SURROUNDS HIMSELF WITH IDIOTS'***

In previous chapters I made reference to a character who goes by the nickname 'Quick Bucks'. He is the proprietor of a car wrecking yard and a couple of other properties in the Port Stephens area and I have been his tenant on more than one occasion in the past. After my heated inter-reaction with the angry fishermen I made a snap decision that Bucks property out on the Salamander wetlands was my best option for a hasty retreat. Immediately I called 'Quick Bucks' on his mobile phone and dangled the promise of some easy cash in front of his nose. Being the capitalistic bastard he is 'Quick Bucks' lunged at the bait I offered him and without too much fuss I established a new residential address. The move brought with it a hike of thirty five dollars a week, plus a portion of the power bill, but who's complaining? My new home was closer to the shopping centre and a far better location than Shoal Bay to access the mangrove lined inlets I wanted to explore. My plan was to only remain at Bucks place until I had established a camp near the water then I would stop paying rent and live in the wilds for free. When I departed Shoal Bay I came away with three fully packed truckloads of stuff I had accumulated from council cleanups and other recycling ventures over the five year period I was there. Buck helped me to make the move in the stinking heat of summer which was a big plus because if he wasn't there with his two ton truck I wouldn't have been able to move it all. Buck recommenced his role as my landlord making it the third time I have been involved in a tenant and landlord relationship with him. Buck and I co-existed quite amicably at the swampy, wetland lot he owns known as 'Hollywood'. The property was originally christened with this name after the song 'Hollywood Seven' which was a big hit in Australia way back when. There is a ramshackle dwelling situated at the front of the lot near a busy highway and for as long as I can remember the flat rate for anyone who stayed in it was seven bucks a night. The most recent occupants in the shack were a young couple by the names of Slinky and Margaret and they owned three large dogs that wanted to rip Husky to shreds. There were a couple of rooms sitting unused upstairs in the house but I wanted to keep Hus clear of their pack. Besides I find it difficult to live in close proximity to other people especially when they are amphetamine addicted fuckwits. I eventually set up my camp in the storage area of a dilapidated old Bedford truck which had been dumped at the back of the lot many years ago. The interior of the truck was open to the elements and it leaked more than any of my previous habitats. There were morning glory vines growing all over it and they had long ago infiltrated the inside of the vehicle. It was more like being in some kind of exotic cave than anything that was ever registered to traverse our nations highways. The next few weeks after I moved into the truck were spent eliminating years of accumulated dust and assorted plant life. To my delight I discovered there was a seven foot diamond python living behind the seat in the trucks cabin and he became my second pet after Husky. I laboured through the filthy heat of the day to construct a chicken wire enclosure for 'Beelzebub' the snake which covered the whole underside of the truck. It encircled a couple of occupied rat holes in the process and formed a living larder for the snake. At night I would hear him pounce on some unsuspecting rodent and a couple of times I got to see his rat devouring routine in the middle of the day. The large, heavy duty tarps I pilfered from the construction site of the resort were sufficient to cover the entire truck and the over hanging excess was propped up with bamboo poles to form sun protective verandas.

To get a light happening so I could work in the evenings I ran a long power lead from the laundry in the house to my campsite. When I went sniffing around looking for something to cover the glare of the light I found a red, plastic lamp cover which looked a bit like an old fashioned street light. It was reminiscent of something you might see in a nineteen fifties movie set in the darkest corner of New Orleans or some other equally sex and underworld oriented red light district. The lantern did the job nicely to soften the glare of the light and it was to become one of my favourite possessions. I like to think I will take a little bit of the steamy nightlife with me wherever I go into the future, as it is so closely intertwined with memories of the busking years. Wherever there are hookers present and intoxicated punters roaming the night a street performer will never go hungry. Not that anything like that exists anywhere in the Port Stephens area. The place is so squeaky clean, middle class and Christian that a get down a dirty performer such as I wouldn't make a brass razoo.

Through an old mate at a cement mixing business down the road Buck has established a way of concreting his property for free. When the trucks are returning to the depot with left over cement in the back they make a habit of pouring it on his land rather than taking it to the council tip. He has saved untold thousands of dollars by getting his lot concreted in this way and it's testimony to his normal brand of day to day ingenuity. The Bedford was perched at the very edge of the dried concrete flow as it cascaded off the flat land into the swamp. Where the hardened, lava like flow ends Buck has extended the angle of the slope with a terraced embankment of old car tyres. This will eventually become the landscaped surrounds for a large freshwater dam. A roller door at the rear of the truck faced right onto the wetland swamp and it provided a sweeping view of the surrounding area. The entire lot would best be described as an automotive graveyard which includes everything from written off late model sedans, to British vintage saloons and pre-Castro American classics. These gems of automotive design and craftsmanship however are barely discernable through the tangled mess of rusting metal, fading chrome, rubber, glass and the morning glory vines that enshroud the entire two acre block.

In the months following my occupation of the truck I constructed a timber and ply board platform extending out from the rear bumper. The tall paperbarks around it served as anchor points for shade cloth cover and they were host to yet more morning glory vines. It made quite a picture as I sipped my morning coffee to see humming birds buzzing around, sipping their breakfast out of the purpley, blue flowers. I nicknamed my swampy backyard 'The Everglades'. When it came time to commence work on my new garden I was happy to discover a number of areas between the end of the concrete flow and the car tyres where I was able to dig holes for the platform poles. I used the dark, sedimentary swamp dirt I excavated as an additive to a soil mix I was creating for a series of perma-culture plots. The dried out mud was mixed with fish tubs full of mulchy humus I had carted over from Shoal bay and in the end I had a healthy, nutrient rich mix. A number of thriving plots evolved out of the tyre littered terrain and before long there were pumpkins and chokos growing all over the truck. As well as being the automotive spare parts man in the bay area Buck is also the local marihuana retailer.

One of his more ethical business practices is to remove any seeds he may find in the many pounds of weed that pass through his greedy little hands and I got to gather up the ones that rolled onto the floor of his office. I collected a heap of seeds from between cigarette butts, dog hair and rat droppings and often I would come across a stray bud that had slipped through undetected. I separated the best of the seeds from the pale, unhealthy ones and ended up with about two hundred big black beautys. It was a bit too late in the season to start germinating so the seeds were stashed away in the snake pen in readiness for the first warm days of spring.

I was enjoying the winter sunset beside a warm fire and sipping my usual fill of brown Champaign when I had a sudden, conceptual flash reminiscent of the head trips we used to engage in back in the magic mushroom days. I was struck by the notion that I had somehow escaped the fate of the doomed masses and arrived at the very edge of civilisation. Perhaps the survival instinct I felt back in Shoal Bay and my decision the hit the water were a doorway to self preservation at the absolute fringe of the known world. My inner gypsy has always strived to exist outside of mainstream society and it was like I had reached the outermost perimeter of normality. I reasoned that you don't have to be living in some remote place that is far from big cities or other pockets of human habitation to be detached from the world. The edge of civilisation is a concept, a state of mind and it's one that I am happy to entertain. I like the idea that I am disproving the theory ... 'No man is an island'. The 'Edge of civilisation' theory included my capitalist landlord 'Buck' who is part of a rat bag minority within the mainstream flow of the business world. He operates outside of what is defined as 'normal' by most clean living people because his interests extend into areas other than mere commerce and family affairs. His outside interests include being part of a rock band, recreational drug usage, radical political views and science fiction inspired conspiracy theories. Like myself and the rest of the abnormal minority Quick Bucks and the Hollywood homestead are at the outer edge of social acceptability. We occupy an outpost at the perimeter of civilisation and I guess we deserve all the weird looks we get from those who follow the path most travelled. Any praise I may assign to Quick Bucks is based on the explorative nature of conversations we used to have about life and the mysteries of the great unknown. It is definitely not applicable to his army of car dismantling workers who would go into a state of catatonic bewilderment if you used words any bigger than ... "Suck more piss".



No sooner was the domestic reality of my truck and garden established before a shift in the winds of chance caught my sails and altered my course through life. I was browsing close to closing time at my favourite little establishment, need I say ... 'The Tip Shop Recycle Depot' when I spotted an unusual item you don't come across everyday. Right out the back, between the depot yard and the landfill area I spied the 'You fucking beauty!' ... 'Bargain of the Millennium'. There was a fully rigged tri-maran yacht sitting on a boat trailer amid busted up old caravans, the odd car body and a mountain of long extinct refrigerators. Excavators and spiked landfill rollers were moving heart stoppingly close to it which inspired me to make haste towards the office of my old mate Dave at the front of the complex. I located him and the rest of the volunteer staff relaxing in easy chairs around the counter area, sucking on beers. Dave is the resident fork lift operator and his vintage vehicle is adorned with plastic models of Godzilla and other such dinosaur oriented creatures that have been donated to the community based organisation over the years. When I enquired about the price of the boat I was given the exiting news that I could have it for a mere three hundred dollars. What a fantastic deal, but it sounded too good to be true. From what I had seen on just a brief outside inspection it looked like the kind of rig you see on the side of the road for five to seven grand. The trailer looked in really good condition and it would have been valued at more than five or six hundred bucks without a boat on it. Once the price was established I asked about the history of the boat and received the full story on how it came to be there. Apparently some punter had left it in the carpark area of a local storage facility. The owner of the place had ordered that a number of illegally parked cars, caravans and boats be removed but the bloke had nowhere to take it. Rather than have it carted off and disposed of he donated it to the Tip shop in the hope it might find a good home. Dave made mention of the fact the boat owners predicament was the result of a messy divorce. Poor bastard. Such is life I guess, his loss is my gain and once time payment details were established I was the proud new owner of a run down, but highly salvageable yacht.

On closer inspection I found the vessel was complete in all it's rigging except for the existence of any sails. I figured I had enough large, white tarps to remedy the situation and besides my imaginings for the boat were more as a flat water fishing vessel I could live on than any kind of racing vessel, bound for the high seas. I have always maintained a healthy contempt for gail force winds as they tend to happen at precisely the wrong moment. Mighty gusts have rendered many a campsite unliveable with their fury and on three separate occasions I have narrowly escaped injury when my sleeping quarters were demolished by large, windswept branches. To further fuel my contempt for the wind I only ever fish with handlines which makes it a hindrance even at moderate speeds. It's almost impossible to penetrate the resistance with a light sinker and more often than not you end up with a tangled line. With the realisation that the necessary sailing equipment was where it was meant to be it brought a reassessment of my perception that the wind is some kind of enemy. By setting myself to the task of learning how to sail the new boat I could reduce my outboard fuel bill considerably and this thought that gave rise to the notion I should make the wind my friend.

The mast was laying across the central hatch leading into the cabin which made entry difficult so I went in through the rear entrance and crawled through to the cabin. I was barely inside the inner compartment before I was imagining where my bed and all of my other belongings would go. The whole boat inside and out were painted white except for the sea blue that covered the hull to the level of the waterline. This colour combination is indicative of the fisherman's choice across the globe it was a big feature in the portside harbours when I was travelling in Europe. My passion for the sea faring life was further ignited when I realised that the blue and white colour scheme was the same as it had been at the rear of old Sid's place. This exciting revelation somehow signalled that I had graduated from the role of a mere deckhand to the new position of a fully fledged, ships Captain.



Dave appointed a couple of 'Work for the dole' assistants to the task of towing the boat out to Hollywood and the yacht was unhooked at the towbar alongside the old Bedford. I spent the next few days unloading stuff from the truck to the boat, but a dramatic reduction in storage and living space meant I had to dispose of all but the most essential things I owned. It was quite an odd sensation throwing a host of unwanted man made objects down the concrete and tyre bordered slope into the swamp, because I'm supposed to be a greenie. It felt like an act of environmental vandalism that threatened the validity of all I believe. I drew a modicum of comfort from the knowledge the whole embankment is going to be covered in cement with local council approval so I wasn't creating any kind of 'illegal' pollution. Clinging to this flimsy defence in a mood of relative innocence I didn't feel quite so guilty discarding of my rubbish in the once pristine setting. Old cassette decks and computer parts were cast out along with CD players, speaker cabinets and other outdated technology. Clothes I hadn't worn for ages were thrown on top and at the end of my labours it felt like a valuable unburdening ritual. An attitude of non attachment can be a valuable asset if you don't want to spend your whole life carting shit around. Yet another once in a lifetime bargain came my way when I told Dave I wanted something to make an enclosure for the boat. A little light went on above his head then he escorted me to some piles of heavy duty netting up against a back fence.

The nets had flowering vines growing all over them but they were still in usable condition. We struggled to haul the heavy rolls out and once free of the vines I estimated there was enough to completely enclose the boat. They might also protect my garden on the slope from invading armies of hungry pests. In the following days I erected the nets on lengths of wire rope that were attached high in the paperbarks. As well as enclosing the yacht and my garden plots they formed a perfect barrier to keep Husky off the highway. The true value of the enclosure came when the Smelly undies brothers paid me an unexpected visit. They had somehow found out where I was living and they were noticeably surprised to find me behind barrier with a locked gate. As I silenced Husky they surveyed my impenetrable compound looking for a way to get in. With voices raised and fists clenched I was told by the pair that I had to cough up more than a thousand bucks for the removal of rubbish from Sids place. The so called rubbish they were barking about was the concreted garden plots and the fish pond I had constructed in the courtyard. The brothers destroyed my concreting handy work during renovations to the property and what remained wouldn't have filled a common box trailer. Over the shouting I informed them that the going rate for a single trailer drop off at the local tip was about fifteen dollars and I would be fucked if they were going to get a red cent more. Mortal threats were screamed out as they departed the front gates of the property with wheels spinning furiously in the gravel. With those bilge rat fuckheads now knowing where I lived the timing was perfect for the arrival of my new boat. Life was telling me it was time to stop dreaming of living out on the water and go hands on to make it happen. I had work quickly to get the vessel sea worthy because blood hungry sea dogs were hot on my trail and the call to the water was getting much too hard to resist. On my first night of sleeping in the cabin of the yacht I lay awake processing the chain of events that had led to my new reality. The decision to get myself living out on the water was triggered after I witnessed the nine eleven attacks and it was just after that I was forced out of my home in Shoal bay. If those two things didn't take place then I wouldn't have moved to Hollywood and there's a good chance I wouldn't have scored the boat. Life talks to us and steers us where it wants us to go, if only we can see it.

Each day as I worked in the boatyard to repair the hull and carry out other repairs I found I was blessed with a sense of personal contentment that can only come when a man is in his element. I had never before raised a mast from a horizontal position to it's full vertical glory or hauled an anchor out of a storage hatch onto the upper deck. Something else I had never done was any type of work with fibreglass. Bucks 'know it all' mates used to look in on me whenever they were working on cars out on the slab. As I experimented with the best ways to grind the hull with a sanding disk or lay fibreglass cloth and resin they would stand around outside the enclosure throwing their two bobs worth in about how it should be done. That sort of thing is fine if there is a genuine sense of kinship and camaraderie between those engaging in such an exchange of advice. The only problem was that these guys were a pack of dumb fuck yobbos, who were uneasy with the fact they had an artist living in their midst and jumped at any opportunity to send ridicule my way. Their attempts to make me appear totally incompetent was to no avail however because I was in such a positive and motivated headspace the collective snickering was of no consequence.

The hull and upper deck had surprisingly less damage than you would expect to find on a vessel that had been sold for three hundred dollars. There was a single hole in the starboard side of the hull which was as big as a golf ball, but it became larger than a volley ball with the application of a sanding disk. At the very rear of the hull there was another hole about the same size and these it seemed were the only repairs I had to make before the structure would be water tight. As I set about pricing estimations for things I would need I found that fibreglass resin was the most expensive item on the list. When I first started experimenting with the stuff I was buying one litre cans for twenty bucks at the hardware store. The amount of work that needed to be done meant I had to get a quantity of it in bulk and that could run into the hundreds. Every time I went to the recycle depot Dave and the crew made genuine enquiries about my progress with the yacht and rendered what assistance they could. On one such visit the thing I most needed was made manifest and my restoration expenses were greatly reduced.

There was a manufacturer of bathroom fixtures across the way in the industrial estate and at the end of each month they dropped off a truckload of forty four gallon drums which held the very type of resin I needed. The pumps they used at the factory only reached to about three inches from the bottom which meant there were at least two litres left in each drum. Dave let me drain the unused resin out at the end of each month and in time I had enough to seal the entire boat. Before I could even think about fixing the hull the first thing I had get the boat protected from the elements and dried out enough that the resin would stick. One undetected drip in a serious downpour might ruin a drying hull so this was where all of my large tarps came into play. When the internal structure of the boat was completely dried out and I had sufficiently honed the skill of fibre glassing I started pouring large amounts of resin into the hull. The toxic smell made it impossible to sleep in the cabin any longer so I set up a makeshift shelter under a tarp stretched out over the boom and extending from the mast to the bowrail. It leaked like a motherfucker whenever the bay was battered by a passing storm but Jesus it made me feel alive.



CHAPTER NINE

A MILLION STUFFUPS AT ONCE CAMPING HOLIDAY

My big new years achievement was waking up in time to catch the Sydney harbour fireworks on a livestream, amid internet peak time, wi-fi dropouts. The reason I was so tired is because I spent last night trying to get some shuteye on a camping swag that Joe had laid out on the grassy hunting and foraging ground of countless crawling, biting bull ants. He suspended a mosquito mesh canopy from the corners of the swag up to an overhead rope that was slung between two trees. This had a tarp thrown over it which was pegged into the ground. The only problem was that the insect mesh was tied up way to high leaving an almighty gap around the swag so that any ant, bug, sandfly or mosquito could enter my shelter at their leisure. I managed to keep the insect netting away from my face by blocking as much of the gap with my fishing bucket, the esky, a large battery and the butane cooker. In the relative comfort of my humpy I setup my laptop and a Bluetooth speaker which were coming out of a 12 volt inverter. I was then able to zombie out to a movie, resting on an elbow with cold beers from the esky, which had my pillow leaning up against it. I had a crab pot in the water and two lines out but the spot where I was camping is a nursery for all the unkeepable pip squeaks, so there are no big fishing tales to share. My camping spot also happened to be at the boat ramp area, in a public reserve that sits right in front of the Narrabeen canoe club. Just getting my load out to the lake was quite an accomplishment in itself, because one of the trolley wheels went flat after the first eight clicks or so. This created an imbalance in the weight distribution of my top heavy load which flattened the other trolley wheel in no time flat. (No pun intended) Eventually I was rolling along slowly on just the rims with about six clicks to go till my journeys end. Joe was driving alongside of me in the bus lane with his emergency lights flashing and it came as a welcomed relief when I finally came to a stop down beside the water.



WHERE THERE'S A WILL THERE'S A WAY

As you know I've been more than six years in the grip of lower back and sciatica problems, which has brought with it serious muscular deterioration. Picking myself up from a ground level swag to take a piss was not really an option but I got around this obstacle with the aid of a small bait bucket, which I emptied into the esky when all the beers ran out. With the dawn I stirred to the sound of a hundred noisy kookaburra's and prepared to patch up the leak in my inflatable, which had made it impossible to launch it the day before. Amid my super glue and duck tape repairs who should roll up but the smiling, picture snapping local ranger who was eventually satisfied with my promise that I would be packed up and gone by noon. People just don't change do they? Some piece of shit, goody two shoes jogger or dog walker made a special effort to call up the council and make a complaint about me being there. I can't begin to imagine what small minded, empty lives these people must live. Back in the days when I was camping out all the time out it would have meant I had to go hunting for a new campsite but these day I'm a happy home dweller so it's not really an issue. I only hope when the barbarians take over North Narrabeen that interfering old bush pig who called the rangers is the first one they cook up on the spit.





STORM BREAKER

Living in the cabin and upper deck area of the boat is the closest thing I can imagine to life on board a space station or a shuttle I will ever get to experience. The cramped conditions I had to endure on board my new home made the truck seem like a large and spacious dwelling. After much experimentation and rearrangement my most important belongings including the computer and studio equipment found permanent homes. Things were so squeezed that no object was allowed to move a single centimetre from it's designated location or it would throw the whole arrangement into chaos. If you can visualise the coffin that would be needed to encase adult Siamese twins that's about the amount of elbow room I had to occupy. To avoid the persistent head banging I first experienced while trying to adapt to such a confined space I learned how to orchestrate my movements in and around the boat in a type of yoga routine. When removing myself from my bed in the cabin and venturing out through the hatch to my kitchen it took exactly six deliberate, yoga'esque positioning's of the body. The black leather recliner I had permanently attached to the left side of the outer cabin was where I plonked my arse once I had done my morning yoga and it was my base position for the remainder of the day. From the comfort of the recliner I did short excursions outside to work on the boat and I found this was the only way my lower back would allow me to keep plodding along with all I had to do.

With the passing of time and much profanity I managed to repair the holes in the hull and the various pockets of wood rot located throughout the structure of the vessel. The thinly covered ply and fibreglass pontoons that extended out on either side had sustained the most damage in whatever incident had caused the boat to be hauled out of the water. As I pottered around the pontoons I noticed through a circular hatch there were ocean dwelling life forms still inhabiting the rotted out insides. Fern like growths and things resembling starfish had somehow survived long after the sea water had drained away and been replaced with rainwater dripping down through the holes. As I examined them further I spotted something on the hull that I hadn't seen before. Barely visible under countless layers of marine paint I was able to read where the yachts original name had been inscribed. It was 'Stormbreaker'.



THE TRI-MARAN WAS THE PINNACLE OF MY WATER BOUND ESCAPADES

The everglades underwent a dramatic transformation when a fast moving bushfire ripped through the area. It was so close to the property that it ignited some of the car bodies scattered around the lot. After extinguishing the burning cars the local fire crew commenced back burning around the fence line as I frantically cut away melting tarps from the tops of burning trees. The blaze came so close to destroying the boat that there were a number of scorch marks on the freshly painted bow. The most amusing detail to come out of the bushfire was the fact the firemen had spotted my concealed seedling plots near the fenceline and they saved them with a friendly squirt. When I checked out the aftermath the following day I was as blown away to think those straight looking fire crew guys might be smokers. It's often said about dope plants ... "If it doesn't kill them it's good for them" and those infant sprouts were a living testimony that the saying is true. Large trees throughout the wetland had fallen during the fire and there were exposed root systems at every turn.

The grasses and low shrubs were all gone and what was left was a perfect, charcoal rich environment for growing a crop. I placed the surviving seedlings close to the roots of fallen trees where the soil had been turned and they flourished under a network of chicken wire cages. When the swamp went up in flames it exposed a series of groundwater ponds that dotted the landscape and made my watering duties relatively easy. As the growing season passed from spring to late summer the impact of the drought really hit home for me as all but the largest of the ponds dried up. In the months after the fire I managed to cultivate seven plants to full maturity and I reckon my bush buds were as good if not better than Bucks chemically charged, hydroponic stuff. I didn't have to buy any pot off the Greedy bastard for ages after the harvest and my secret stash kept me going in the months that followed. To keep his team of lackies wide awake when they are on the job Buck has always made it his policy to provide an amphetamine based bonus system. The regular brand of speed like the stuff we used to snort in the nightclub days was getting harder to find and the introduction of 'Ice' into the equation sent things into a rapid decline.

I blew the shit a couple of times with the crew in Bucks office but the little businessman inside my head said 'The effect does not justify the outlay'. I was only surviving on welfare payments and I couldn't risk any expensive habits. This rare act of drug use responsibility saved me a whole lot of cash but it further distanced me from everyone else. My decision not to participate allowed me to witness the transformation of my old mate 'Quick Bucks' from a millionaire and then some, to a stressed out bankrupt, in hiding from the sheriff.

As I neared the end of my boat restorations behind the locked gates of the compound enraged fishermen dominated my thoughts. There had been no return visits but I knew they were just waiting for the right chance to pounce. I assumed it wouldn't happen at Hollywood as there were always too many potential witnesses around but the same thing couldn't be said for my intended home out on the water. The whole Port Stephens area was patrolled by the brothers and their cronies and once afloat I didn't like the idea of getting a late night visit when they found out where I was moored. In light of this factor I made a spontaneous captain's decision that my maiden voyage would only be to make sure the yacht didn't leak at the hull. Then I would take the boat out of the water and hide it someplace where the threat of personal violence no longer existed. It was at this point my imagination went completely haywire as I considered the range of wonderful new options before me. The one that jumped out and went "me!", "me!" "pick me!" was the possibility of putting the boat into storage while I grew an even larger crop than the last. If I could get enough cash together I might be able to transport the whole boat and trailer rig to Grafton by rail and then have it towed the remaining distance to Brunswick Heads.

With work on the hull complete and the last of my budding heads harvested there was nothing keeping me at Hollywood so I started making preparations to get the boat out on the water. The first thing I had to do was disconnect both of the outriggers at the mounting bolts and strap them close to the hull with the drums resting on the mudguards of the trailer. It was no easy task on my own but it had to be done to enable a balanced load for the tow. A small, plastic dinghy I had scored through Dave was winched at great effort onto the upper deck then the rig was ready to travel. The final component I had to come up with was an outboard motor to make my man living on a yacht with his dog fantasy complete. I dismantled the boatyard over a sweaty and exhausting three day period and what wasn't packed away in storage I donated to Bucks recycling empire. He had started selling everything in sight to settle an overdue mortgage payment and it made me feel good to give a struggling meth amphetamine addict a hand. Buck was always one of the most easy going blokes I know, but for the first time in our twenty year history as buddies, cracks were beginning to show. The stresses were getting to him big time and it manifested in 'Hitler'esque' tantrums designed to inform all concerned that he was "Still the King of the Shitpile".

A big work burst was underway to get him out of debt which involved the use of an excavator to crush most of the cars on the lot and sell them as scrap metal. The yacht was at great risk of being damaged in the process so at the first sign of a clearing among piles of crushed cars I towed it out of the Hollywood lot. In more approachable moments Buck allowed me the use of a Ford station wagon to tow the boat out to the ramp. I suspect I got to use the car more because he wanted to create room for his crumpled wrecks than any sudden rush of brotherly love. Whatever the case I am unlicensed and both the car and trailer were unregistered so I opted for a midnight run down to the water. It was just a couple of days to Christmas which seemed like the best time to make my move as there would be so much boating activity happening around the bay. The Waterways Authorities are kept busy at holiday time with drunk boaties and the like so what I was planning had a reasonable chance of escaping their attention. As luck would have it a dirty great storm broke overhead while I was connecting the towbar of the car to the boat trailer. I was drenched to the bone as I jumped in behind the wheel, but it felt wonderful to be on the move. The rain dropped off as Husky and I completed the short run down to the Taylors beach boat ramp so on our arrival I unhooked the unregistered car and stashed it up a side street. Now even if the cops drove by a yacht and trailer sitting at the top of the ramp wouldn't look out of place or suspicious. The car was out of view so I stretched out on my bedroll with a cold one and counted the minutes to sunrise. There were holidaymakers hitting the beach from all directions as I brewed morning coffee and scanned the horizon for cruising police vessels. My rig received no shortage of attention from the early morning boaties but it wasn't obstructing the ramp in any way and that was a big plus. One mobile phone transmitted complaint to the Harbour Authorities could stop my big new adventure dead in it's tracks before it even got started. As I was remounting the outriggers I got chatting with a Taylors Beach local called Peter who was a few years older than me. He expressed verbal amusement at the rough and ready appearance of the boat I was preparing to launch and he warned me about the acute slope of the ramp. Peter took one look at the bald tyres on the car I was planning to use and he was quick to announce that I wouldn't be able to do it. It just so happened his Land rover was parked nearby and in the true spirit of Christmas he offered to lower my yacht into the water. A couple of blokes who were fishing came over to help as Peter and I attempted to manually nudge the hull off the rollers on the submerged boat trailer. With their help the job was made easier but the tide was not quite up enough to lift it clear. A whole bunch of kids who were swimming around us joined in the wrestle and with a collective sigh of relief the drum supported hull floated free in the shallows. I thanked all of the holidaymakers for their kind help and wished them a merry Christmas. Skidding and sliding at full stick up the ramp Peter eventually got my boat trailer out of the water and we chained it up to a post. When I returned to the boat Husky was looking on curiously from under the bow rail as I trudged off waist deep in the water. The bowline was gripped tightly on my shoulder and I was on the lookout for any stationary stingray that might happen to be sitting close by. It was in those first moments of departure I sensed the gravity of change and I had a private chuckle as our water bound adventure had begun. The inlet I was planning to moor the yacht in was about two hundred metres past the ramp and to get there I had to walk it through an obstacle course of beach goers.

I encountered countless swimmers, kayaks, sailboards, jet skis and a host of assorted inflatable objects. Once free of the frolicking crowd and approaching the mouth of the inlet I lowered the bowline from my shoulder and turned around to see how far I'd come. It's a bloody good job I did because a waterways patrol boat had just passed a nearby island and was it heading directly towards the ramp. I was out of their line of view for the time being and to keep it that way I pulled the yacht in between two large mangroves. I threw a baited handline and played catch the stick with Husky until the patrol boat motored off towards Lemmon tree passage. By the time they had finally gone the tide had started to recede so I decided to stay where I was rather than attempting an entry into the inlet. Hus was delighting in his new surroundings and watching him play was a living affirmation that I was making progress. Back at Hollywood he was cooped up in the boatyard most of the time and now he had a lot more territory to bounce around in. The sun went down over the bay as I fired up my portable butane cooker to fry some freshly caught whiting. The lights of Lemmon Tree passage were flickering across the water and they provided a view equal to any seen from the balconies of the rich folk on the hill. As I chopped up a fresh mull of home grown buds I reflected on the events following my stormy departure from Hollywood and I concluded that my efforts had been a success. I had managed to launch the boat and conceal it in the mangroves, narrowly avoiding the attention of the authorities and I was ready to enter the inlet on the new day.

Up with the first hint of the dawns light and an incoming tide I pulled the boat out of it's hiding spot and commenced to negotiate the thin channels leading into the inlet. It was bloody tough going because I had to wade through deep mud in the centre of the channels and scramble over a number of oyster covered rocks. At the peak of the rising tide I was relieved to find I had just enough clearance to make it through the final opening into the creek. As the surface scum began to turn back towards the sea I dropped anchor on the only flat and grassy bend among the mangroves. At days end I got a fire going at the waters edge and Husky barked at a growling koala high in the gum trees. Beyond the mangroves and paperbarks there was a column of tall palm trees whose discarded fronds provided ideal fuel for the fire. The mooring I had dropped anchor at was to become my new address for the next eight months or so and in that time the only people I encountered were the odd kayak enthusiast or recreational angler. I was well out of view of the Water Police and the Council Rangers which meant the only way I could get busted was if someone made an official complaint to the authorities. My days were mostly spent fishing and laying crab pots from the mouth of the estuary to the upper reaches and indulging Husky in the joys of our water wonderland. He went into a new mode of aliveness in his new surroundings and the inner hunter emerged as a result. Back at Hollywood the best he ever got to do was bark at the odd possum up a tree and now he had everything from wallabies and kangaroos to giant goannas to sniff out and pursue. The mosquito and sandfly season was in full swing and it was not at all enjoyable to be on the outer deck when they were swarming so I set about enclosing the whole deck area with shade cloth. The beams that supported the drums on my pontoons were covered over with lengths of marine ply which greatly extended my living space and allowed for the creation of an outside kitchen.

Shadecloth was nailed to the outer edge of the wooden boards and then stretched up over the boom to be nailed into place on the other pontoon. There was not a lot of headroom inside the newly insect proofed outer deck but the fact I was no longer being eaten alive made it a worthwhile exercise. With the move from the boatyard I had become disconnected from the luxury of the electricity grid which meant that my creative projects came to a grinding standstill.

A solar panel capable of fully charging a full sized flat battery was out of my price range so I invested in one of the portable GMC generators they were flogging for a hundred bucks at the hardware store. To avoid the toxic fumes of the generator I mounted it at the very tip of the bow and more often than not when it was running I had to re-moor the yacht according to which way the breeze was blowing. The addition of a power generator to my list of tools enabled me to make a healthy start on the manuscripts for this book and it allowed for some serious headway with the albums. Other than my bed the whole inside cabin area became a floating recording studio come writers retreat and every minute I worked brought pure joy knowing I had externalised my dream and I was living it. Things were falling together perfectly and an example of this was the way I replaced my battered old plastic tender with a watertight aluminium dinghy. I was fishing just past the mouth of the estuary when I spotted something rocking among the mangroves. I rowed over to where I had seen a flash of silver and discovered a nine foot, pointy nosed tinny in the shallows. There was no attachment of any kind to an anchor and the severed bowline was badly frayed. Positive I had come upon a drifter separated from a yacht somewhere I tied it up to a mangrove root to give the owner a fighting chance. I checked in on the boat every afternoon for three days running and there was no indication it had been touched in any way. Satisfied I had given the previous owner the same amount of time to search it out that I would expect I rowed it into my inlet with the old plastic dinghy in tow. The new tinny was a critical component for the success of my adventure and the way I came by it could only be described as magic.

A fierce storm was brewing out to sea and I was battening down the hatches when I spied a rather large, young individual trudging through the mangroves hauling a backpack. I spotted him before he was able to see myself or the boat and it was only when Husky started barking he knew we were there. I jumped down from the gang plank to greet him as he arrived in my campsite. Patrick from San Francisco promptly introduced himself as he enquired where he might pitch his tent for the night. I informed him about countless nests of large green ants in the area as I introduced myself then I offered him the use of my firewood shelter among the palms. No sooner had we got in the door of the large tarpaulin structure before the first rains and hailstones began to pelt down. I hadn't collected any wood for a few days so the available space was more than enough for him to pitch his one man tent in. What kindling remained I used to get a small fire going and we shared easy going conversation as he unpacked his tent. He extracted a bottle of duty free whisky from a side pocket in his back pack and offered it up as I ignited the big fat joint I had just rolled. Once he had erected his hi tech alpine tent we exchanged travelling tales into the night as the rains and the whisky subsided.

San Francisco has always been a source of fascination to me because of its counter culture history and Patrick gave a good account of where the place is at in the present day. As it turned out my unexpected guest was a discontented and disillusioned twenty three year old who had hit the road in search of adventure and meaning. Exactly the same by nature it would seem as those who made the nineteen sixties the cultural explosion they were. Patrick was as blown away by our connection as I was myself. For me it was one of those rare opportunities to check in with a younger generation adventurer and he was bright enough to keep up with anything I came out with. For him it was exactly the type of experience he had come looking for 'Downunder'. He said to have met some old guy living on a boat with his dog among the mangroves was the best he could have possibly wished for. This passing snippet of information confirmed that I was living exactly the kind of existence I was destined to live.

Pat stayed around my camp for about six days and he was very easy to be around. He got right into the fishing and mudcrab hunting thing and as we sat waiting for a bite we must have divulged every last detail of our lives. After contact addresses and fond farewells were exchanged Patrick trudged back up the beach towards civilisation. I was told I had a place to stay if ever I made it 'stateside' and by the time he vanished around the last bend I was absorbed in a novice writers fantasy. In it I was passing through San Francisco on the latest leg of a university campus tour, promoting my best selling book. Hey just a minute. This might be a forecast of things to come. After six days of being in the constant company of Patrick something shifted in my perceptions of what this venturing yachtsman experience was all about. My original objective was to exist in the wilds in solitude other than the company of my dog but Patrick reminded me there were a whole lot of interesting people in the world I might never get to meet. My thoughts turned to what other encounters I might have if I moved the boat further into the bay and it didn't take long before I was studying maps of the area. The spot that stood out as the most logical point to aim for was a large rocky cove known as Cromitary Bay, because it was close to the local shops and it fed into a number of inlets where I might conceal the yacht. My strategy was to first explore the area in the new tinny with my bedroll stretched out on a ply centerboard across the seats. The pushbike could be strapped across the bow ready for use at the other end and with some luck the authorities wouldn't spot me.



CHAPTER TEN

ALL PEOPLED OUT

There's been a bit of a shift in the dynamics down at the old Steve's boatyard headquarters and it ain't all good. Due to my newfound writing obsession I've been up all night most nights choofing on weed, drinking and banging the keys, so I'm operating in the daylight hours under extreme conditions of sleep deprivation. In some areas Joe is such a hopeless, incompetent fuck up and in others he is almost proficient. It's just the ongoing frustration of being limited in my physical abilities and having to endure watching an able bodied person screw up the most simple tasks. The normal practice since Joe has been on board is he rocks up about 1.00pm on the days he is rostered and he comes in through the front door which I unlock around sunrise when I get up to take a piss. He generally waits around on the couch doing stuff on his phone until I am conscious enough to get up and turn the jug on for coffee. Since he's been my care worker I have requested that if we are conversing with each other about household stuff it shouldn't be from room to room because of my speech and hearing problems. In spite of numerous requests like this he persists on walking away to another part of the unit as I am attempting to communicate something or he will half shout things that I am expected to hear with the jug whistling, the bird squawking or music blaring out from the hi fi. Today it came to the boil when he accused me of not managing my time and my daily list of needs properly and that was the thing that ignited my wick. I had made three attempts to tell him that I wanted to go fishing and after having shook his head in agreement he insisted that I hadn't said a word about it. So as to avoid an all out clash I just loaded up the scooter with my rods and left him to it. If I was wanting to live with that kind of co-existence bullshit I would be married or in a relationship with a woman who I would tolerate that kind of mundane crap from in exchange for getting my dick wet. I'm really feeling that until the last page is done on the book I should just get the cleaner in once a week and the fuckups and distractions of the visiting carers can just stay the fuck out of my life. I'm feeling like Jack Nicolson portrayed it in 'the shining'. On a slightly lighter note I landed a good sized flathead and a big healthy flounder at the little beach I go to on the Narrabeen lakes. It's a risky place to fish because all manner of birds nestle in the treetops overhead including pigeons, cockatoos and oversized pelicans. If my concentration on fishing ever becomes so intense that I don't see them arriving I run the distinct risk of copping a big, juicy bird flop on the top of my head. It's happened more than once and I'm sure those fine feathered little bastards turn their arseholes my way to deliberately get me. Hey listen. As well as all of the ideas that have been hemorrhaging out of my head for the book new poems are emerging as well. Try this little bit of nonsense on for size.



PARTS

THE FIRST PARTY OF THE FIRST PART, SAID TO THE PARTY OF THE SECOND PART

I'LL IMPART TO YOUR HONOUR JUST A LITTLE PART

OF HOW THE PARTNERSHIP WAS DOOMED, FROM THE VERY START..

MY DEFENDANTS CLAIM OF A BROKEN HEART,

BEING CAUSED BY THE FACT SHE'S A FLIRTY LITTLE TART

IS A CLEAR INDICATION THEY WERE WORLDS APART

BEFORE THEIR WAYS WERE PARTED

IN THE LINGERIE SECTION OF WALL MART.

THE FACT THAT BOTH PARTIES PLAYED AN EQUAL PART

IN THE SQUABBLE AT THE PARTY THAT TORE THEM APART

EXPLAINS THE LOSS OF HIS PRICELESS ART

AND THE KNIFE IN THE PILLOW THROUGH A LIPSTICK HEART..

ONE MILLION DOLLARS IS A MINOR PART

OF THE MONEY THAT HE MADE ON THE MUSIC CHARTS

WHEN MY CLIENT WAS PORTRAYED AS A GREEDY, GOLD DIGGING, UPSTART.

IN THE FINAL JUDGEMENT THIS COURT IMPARTS

I PLEAD WITH YOUR HONOUR TO HAVE A HEART

IN THE NAME OF WHAT IS RIGHT AND IN THE NAME OF ART

GIVE THE BITCH HER MONEY

AND YOU MIGHT NOT APPEAR

QUITE SUCH A DODDERY

AND OUT OF STEP OLD FART..



SANDFLY CITY

With my crew of one Husky dog sitting at the bow I set out early, putting along with the aid of a two horsepower outboard I swapped for some pot at the Tip shop. The bloody thing was so deficient in power that even when it was running full stick I had to row as hard as I could to make it around the rocky points and sandbars. It took about three hours of constant motoring and rowing before I was finally able to tie the dinghy up on a small palm lined beach inside of Cromitary Bay. Beyond a small park through palms and hanging vines I could see luxury, beachfront homes but there were no people in my immediate sight. I had ample time to lay my bedroll and tarp it over before a guy walking a dog passed by. We exchanged friendly hellos and he didn't give my floating habitat a second glance. I assumed the rich people in this neighbourhood might take exception to a water gypsy camping in their midst, so I tried to keep my presence as low profile as I could. The spot I had settled was the best possible place I could as it was the start of a rocky outcrop which was separated from the main beach by a fallen tree. The dog walkers and joggers all seemed to have made the dead tree the point at which they turned back so only those who went beyond the log knew we were there. When the tide turned and the fish stopped biting I left Hus to guard my camp and rode into the Little Salamander shopping centre for supplies. I had to push the bike up a couple of slopes but apart from that it was a relatively flat run. I completed the shopping run in about a third of the time it normally took from Taylors beach which confirmed it was a better location to be in.

On the second day of my scouting mission I motored out from the beach and circled the bay through countless oyster racks in search of a deep, secluded inlet. There were a number of them around the place but the one that most suited my needs was situated directly in front of a large quarry. Even though it was very noisy from the quarry operation I decided to make it my base as I further checked out the territory as it offered the flattest and shortest possible bike run into the shops. From the waterline I had to walk the bike along a sandy, grassland track, but less than sixty feet from the boat I was on the bitumen road at the rear of the industrial estate. I only got to stay in that area for one night because in the morning two quarry workers walked into my camp accompanied by Council Rangers. They said they were preparing to blast the following day and they didn't want anyone in the area. The busty, young, female Ranger was sporting a badge that read 'Team Leader' and she was quick to establish I was sleeping in the dinghy. She declared that I was camping illegally and I should count myself lucky I was getting off with a warning. I was quick to inform our sexy little Council Ranger that the boat was in the water and I was out fishing which meant if anything I was a Water Authorities or NSW Fisheries problem. The Team Leader was quite a babe about thirty two years old and with my last remark the hint of an amused smile escaped her lips. Before the officials had departed the scene I was moving out of the inlet towards the mouth.

I waved them a cheery farewell as I putted off with imaginings of the female Ranger writhing naked on my bedroll. All wishful thinking aside I was still concerned they might notify the water police so I pulled into the mouth of the next inlet and went as far up it as I could. Where I finally tied up was so far out of range of the large, twin hulled, police boats they would need to mount a kayak expedition to find me.

On one of my daily beer runs I stopped to fill my water bottle at a tap beside a plumbing shop. Just inside the roller door I spotted a Honda motorbike sitting under a dusty old tarp and I wandered over to make some enquiries. I was soon to discover that the guys who ran the plumbing business were also keen power boat enthusiasts. They were both bent over the V8 engine of their boat with greasy hands when I walked into the showroom but they were happy to carry on a conversation at the same time. As they worked Harry and Dan informed me the bike had belonged to their 'egg head' nephew who filled the tank with the wrong type of fuel. They said I could have it for a hundred bucks and if I wanted to come back in a couple of days they would see if they could get it going. Motorheads. Don't you just love em? When I returned to the plumbing depot as arranged the old posty bike was up and running with a new tank of fuel, a new sparkplug and points. They guys received an extra thirty bucks on top of the hundred for their trouble but it was well worth it in my view. I was the proud owner of the kind of bike you see in the trading post for six or seven hundred bucks at the very least. After I had handed over the cash I stashed my pushbike at the rear of their shop and rode the Honda back to my camp. Husky was barking his head off as I moved towards him and even after I had turned the engine off he was still suspicious of the bike. He growled around it sniffing the tyres and then he retreated to a safe distance.

I had scouted Cromitary Bay enough to know it was where I needed to be so I decided to get back to where the yacht was moored and prepare for the next big move. My main priority was to get the unregistered Honda out of public view so with the dawn I bashed a track through the beach scrub and mangroves back to the yacht and chained the bike up inside the wood tent. I had to walk the ten or so kilometres I had followed to get back to Husky and the tinny. The next morning I retrieved the pushbike and gave the plumbers a positive report on how the Honda had performed in the mangrove mud. I motored out of the entrance of the bay that afternoon and by sundown I was sucking on a cold one on the deck of the yacht, having a private chuckle at my good fortune. At great effort I was to perform a skillful balancing act which saw the Honda being wheeled along a double strengthened gangplank and strapped to the base of the mast. The wheels sat neatly in the pontoon docks and held it in position. Another recent acquisition from the recycle depot was a fully rigged catamaran that Dave let me have for a hundred and fifty bucks. The cat was acquired as a trailer for the yacht. The plastic dinghy was tied to the upper deck and my new tinny was towed along behind the cat. My plan was for a night run out through the mouth of the inlet on a high tide and then by hugging the shoreline past Taylors Beach I would make it to Mud Point before daylight. Just around the next bend after the Point is where Cromitary Bay begins and on the scouting mission I had found a small beach with a grassy clearing. This is where I intended to establish my first campsite once I had the yacht in the area.

The sky was clear and a half moon reflected peacefully on flat water as I connected the battery terminals for a car headlight sitting halfway up the mast. Once ignited it lit up the mangroves for miles and the water came to life as schools of mullet and garfish were dazzled by sudden brightness. The tide was fast approaching the peak as I untied the mooring lines. I left the anchor in position where it sat and the boats all swung around in formation to settle on the opposite bank. When the tide started to turn my flotilla of watercraft was pulled into the middle of the estuary above the central channel and I was off. From the bow of the yacht I used the long, but very light aluminium mast from the catamaran to keep the boats away from protruding branches. I was moving out of the inlet at the very start of the turning tide so it was relatively easy going to manoeuvre through the mouth. Now over the sandbars near the estuary entrance I was able to climb into the water and take my position on the bowline. There were a number of submerged snags in the immediate area that could puncture the hull of the yacht so I walked the boats through rather than using the pole. I made it clear of the snag ridden mouth as the outgoing tide increased in velocity and pulled me away from the shore. The current started dragging me into deeper water towards the twinkling lights of Lemon Tree Passage and this was the wrong direction completely for where I needed to be. My original plan was to hug the shore until I was past the ramp and jetty area of Taylors Beach but the strong current and a sudden increase in wind speed were not going to allow it to happen. With little time to think in the changing conditions I quickly devised a plan 'B' and allowed the boats to be pulled into the middle of the yachts and houseboats moored off Taylors Beach. I tied up at a frantic speed between two large houseboats and once that was done my vessels were mostly out of view of onlookers. Much to my relief the wind swung around towards the shore as the kookaburras started to yodel and dawn light lit up the morning sky. With the wind conditions now working in my favour I attempted to get back to the beach with the severely undersized motor running at full stick. When I was only halfway there it began to smoke and splutter in a sickening, mortally wounded display then it died with a horrible final cough. It was a good job I had decided to have the cat mast on the tinny with me because without it I wouldn't have been able to make it the last ten or so meters to the shore. The Taylors Beach boatramp was about one kilometre behind me and up ahead a further two was the first available mangrove sheltered spot where I could conceal my flotilla of boats. A number of watercraft were fishing the early tide and it was only a matter of time before the water police did their morning patrol. After I had re attached the tinny to the rear of the cat I walked the boats through small shoreline breakers until I reached overhanging mangroves at a small, rocky cove. I struggled to drag the yacht and all it was towing into the cove and eventually I was able to tie up in shallow waters obscured from view by palms and hanging foliage. I was on an open stretch of beach wetting a line and throwing the stick for Husky when the water police patrol came through. They stopped alongside a couple of recreational fishing vessels for a short time and then motored off in the opposite direction to where I had dropped anchor. Good stuff. They hadn't spotted the boats which gave me time to plan my next move.

My trip to Cromitary Bay was based on the weather reports I had been following closely and the window of clear skies they promised was soon to be closed. Thunderheads were gathering in the East and I had no option but to batten down the hatches and sit out the blow. Just after sunset the evening breeze picked up to become solid gusts and by eleven o'clock the storm front was rocking the boats wildly. Deafening thunder directly overhead and lightening strikes to match provided an ideal backdrop as I sipped on a wee dram in the Captains cabin and contemplated my next move when the weather settled down. After two days of dirty conditions the sun shone through and I made preparations to ship out. A night run from the cove to little beach at the start of Cromitary Bay was my planned objective and without the use of the outboard it was definitely going to be a challenge. The night tide came up and I hauled the boats out of their hiding place but when I got to the sandbars bordering the cove I found the water was much too shallow. The bow of the yacht bogged deep into the sand and while I was climbing on board to get my pole the wind picked up swinging the boats around from the rear. The cat and the tinny were directly above the sandbar and they were pulling the yacht backwards with them. Bastard. What an absolute fuck up. Once back in the water and straining over a badly bogged bow nothing I could do with the pole was of any use. The sudden wind increase had swung the boats around and it was just too strong to go against. I climbed back on the yacht and dropped anchor, praying the wind might shift direction and blow me off the sandbar but it didn't happen. By sun up the tide had all but completely receded and my convoy of pleasure craft was left sitting on an exposed sandbar in open view of the bay. The yacht was sitting on its side resting on the drums with the cat and the tinny tied on behind in a sad line of marooned vessels. I knew it was only a matter of time before I would have to deal with the authorities unless by some miracle of fate they didn't spot me. No such luck. The morning patrol came powering in from the direction of Nelson Bay and they cut the engines when my grounded, side leaning yacht came into view. As they approached the sandbar I walked towards them with Husky trying to appear as casual as I could. The response I got to "Hi guys ... what can I do for you?" was "we're here to piss you off". They were a couple of young, hard nosed, footy player types who had no interest in light hearted chatter. The cops were only interested in informing me that I had two days to get my piece of floating junk off the sandbar and remove it from the bay. Along with my personal ID I had to show them proof of ownership for all the boats, the outboard motor and the motorbike. They didn't even bother asking to see any kind of boat licence or registration and left satisfied even though I had failed to show them any paperwork for the tinny. I considered that I had got off lightly and now the only thing to do was work on getting an extension to the two days deadline I had been given. That afternoon I made a call on my mobile phone to office of the Water Police in Nelson Bay and spoke with a Chief inspector Brown. Inspector Brown was far more easy going than his over zealous rookies and when I explained that I needed a one point eight tide at least to get clear of the sandbar he agreed to an extension. He studied a tide chart as we conversed and worked out that I could remain there for a further week and two days. The conversation was so friendly and relaxed that my final parting vocalisation was a friendly little "Chow!" I was lying to the Police Chief about the one point eight meters I would need and on the night tide of the following evening I was able to wrestle the boats away from the sandbar.

I was blessed with a beautifully still night and flat water which allowed me to make it around Mud Point before the sun rose. The mangrove lined beach I tied up at was completely out of view of any police vessels and I imagined the only way they would know my whereabouts was if some oyster farmer made a complaint. I had dropped anchor in the most picturesque of sub tropical settings but by mid morning something I had not bargained for made itself painfully known to me. The area was so badly infested with sandflies that Husky and I had to hide in the stinking hot cabin for most of the day with the hatch closed tight. The insufferable fumes of insect spray got so bad I eventually had to open the hatch and in they came again. The swarm was so thick that in the end all I could do was sit by my twelve volt powered desk fan, fully clothed, with a scarf wrapped around my head. With the new day I commenced work dressed in a jumpsuit I created out of high quality, cotton mosquito netting. I applied roll on repellent through the weaved cotton at regular intervals and it helped to give me fighting chance out in the open. All of my most treasured belongings were loaded out of the yacht and stacked on the catamaran in readiness for the move back to Taylors Beach. I had to leave the Honda where it was in the hope I might be able to retrieve it on a later trip. The moment I had finished securing the yacht and tarping it over I began the long row back to the inlet where my ill fated journey had begun. Once past Mud Point I was able to ride the incoming tide and a favourable back wind saw us back at home base by mid afternoon. Exhausted as I was on our arrival I had to unload my belongings off of the cat and stash them among the palms. Another explosive summer storm was brewing as I raced time and fatigue to erect a makeshift shelter before the rain came down. When the storm passed I got a fire going with some half dry palm fronds and a whole can of outboard motor fuel. After a superb meal of charcoal flathead and baked beans I knocked over the last of my Johnnie Walkers and smoked a few well stacked joints. This was the first time I had been able to properly relax since I left the very spot I was sitting and set off into the bay. Constantly dodging the authorities had taken it's toll and my great outdoors boating adventure was now in a serious state of review. If the whole area on the side of the bay where I wanted to live was as badly infested then it meant the inlet I was planning to settle in was not fit for human habitation. In light of my Water Police and sandfly problems I decided the best option was to return the yacht to my original inlet campsite and then attempt to get it back to Hollywood. Good old common sense had well and truly kicked in to rule my thoughts and I figured the wisest thing I could do was work towards selling the yacht. I had picked it up for a mere three hundred bucks and lived on it for almost a year. I had saved hundreds of dollars in rental costs and I got to have an experience that many only dream about or get to enjoy after a life of hard labour. My hippy trail education had long since taught me not to be attached to material objects as they will only bring misery, so even if the cops impounded my vessel I would just laugh it off as experience. After hearing of my ordeals Buck let me use the Ford a second time to transport my stuff back to Hollywood. I set up a temporary land base in the old Bedford and tinny was left chained upside down among the palms. Buck agreed to take the yacht off my hands for what I had paid for it saying he would float it in the new dam when it was finished. The big question was would it still be there when next I returned to the area. I had it stashed under the cover of the mangroves, but all it would take was a sharp eyed, police helicopter pilot and the game would be well and truly over.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BIG RE THINK

Clint Eastwood's big Time life magazine quote was 'A man should know his limitations'. Pretty insightful for a gun slinging tough guy eh?. I'm still recovering from my lakeside camping mis-adventure four days later with a host of new aches and pains to endure as I contemplate those under the breath words of wisdom. I think I'm ready to accept that all the great outdoors stuff I used to do was good and well for the man I was then, but now it's time to know my limitations like uncle Clint suggests. I do know one thing for certain and that is my next little flight of fancy will be conducted from comfort zone, overnight accommodation with the kind of bedding I've become accustomed to this last six years. How the hell are all of those old, homeless wino bums able to sustain it year in year out? I was stretched out for just one night on a three hundred dollar camping mattress and it nearly killed me. Those old hobos conk out on the bare concrete, in shop entrances and the like and you see them up and about the next morning trotting off to the bottle shop and doing just fine. I think the older I get I might be developing a greater appreciation for what I've got in the way of the creature comforts. The native American Indians place a lot of importance on 'gratitude' as a worthwhile trait to nurture and I guess it's never really too late to start. I mean all you have to do is switch on the telly to get an eyeful of how tough some folks are doing it. Imagine having to trek for twenty miles or so everyday just to get a drink of fresh water. Maybe I shouldn't speak too soon. The looming global 'water crisis' is high on the menu for each and every one of us and in a drought prone place like Australia we should be making water recycling and conservation an absolute national priority. Our vast groundwater reserves are being attacked on all sides by overuse, pollution and rampant mismanagement, so there will be nothing for us to fall back on in the event of a thousand year drought. In any case it may well be that there won't be any ice shelves left in the artic because it's all up for sale on the supermarket shelves.

'ICE' AN'T SO NICE

The setting had altered dramatically on the slab since last I was part of the Hollywood scene. All of the cars except for the vintage classics had been stripped of their components and the rusting remains were carted away for scrap metal. In their place were six shipping containers filled with spare parts and there were countless metal racks around the property holding more of the same. This was Bucks new strategy going into action to get the banks paid off and he had ten full time workers on the payroll working day and night shifts.

A couple of days after my return to Hollywood I locked the truck up and headed back to the tinny to continue my rescue mission of the yacht. The run from the lot back out to Taylors beach was the first real test of how Husky would perform pulling the bike with a fully loaded bike trailer and he really lived up to his name. A couple of times he stopped for a crap at the worst possible locations but apart from that he did a commendable job. The bike trailer had a five horsepower outboard on it I picked up cheap from one of Bucks car part customers. When we got to the boat I unloaded the motor and the supplies then I hid the bike and trailer among the palms. When the tinny was eventually floating in the water it looked overloaded enough to attract the attention of the authorities so another night run would be the best way to avoid their scrutiny. We arrived at the beach near the fallen tree by cover of night and after the tide went out I slept in the dinghy on the sand. At first light I stashed the bulk of my stuff behind a patch of lantana and motored out of the area. The tinny was now far less weighed down and I was more than ready to attempt towing the yacht if it was still there. I crossed the bay and entered the Sandfly zone dressed in my mosquito netting jumpsuit and heavily splashed down with citronella oil. It wasn't a pleasant trip at all because the oil soon mixed with my sweat in the morning sun and it burned like melting wax into my eyes. Once in the general area I had left the yacht I cut the engine beside some oyster racks so I could splash my eyes with bottled water. As unimpaired vision returned I scanned the mangrove lined bank and saw the flash of white hull between the foliage. Good shit. The motorbike was as I had left it and there were no signs that my belongings had been disturbed. Once untied from it's moorings the tri-maran proved quite easy to tow with the five horsepower engine even against the currents. I manouvered the load through an endless network of oyster racks on the highest point of the tide and dropped anchor just off the beach where I had stashed my gear. After loading my camping gear onto the yacht I left Cromitay Bay to the sandflies and putted away back towards Taylors beach. No water police or other such officials crossed our path along the way and by late afternoon the yacht was sitting where it had been before the trouble started.

The following day was spent detaching the mast and laying it along the deck in readiness for road travel. When next I returned to Hollywood Buck and I agreed on a plan whereby I would tow the boat trailer to the ramp and get the yacht in a ready position for the move. It was to take place in two days time on the high tide and hopefully before the cops spotted the yacht out in the open. I was three days over the absolute final deadline as dictated by Inspector Brown, so if anything went wrong they would surely impound it. I had completed my end of the agreement in the specified time and the tide was approaching the peak when I checked in with Buck at his office. The whole rowdy crew were having their smoko break in there as they usually do and I had to wait until a number of work related conversations had concluded before Buck was ready to deal with me. He seemed far more interested in blowing ice and smoking bongos with the lads than remembering our plans and any attempt to talk about tide times fell on deaf ears. By the time we finally arrived at the ramp in Bucks work ute the water had well and truly receded and the boat was on it's side. I suggested that he had left things too late and we should do it the following day but he had other ideas. I knew it would be an exercise in futility to even attempt what Buck was proposing but he was the new owner so I was forced to view it as just more ice crazed entertainment for my memoirs.

After removing the motorbike from the deck I sat on a rock and smoked a joint as Buck fired instructions at a couple of flunkies he had recruited for the job. The boat trailer was dragged down to the base of the ramp and a thick wire cable was attached to a loop on the bow. Just as I had imagined it would the loop snapped away at the first hint of pressure leaving a gaping hole you could stick your head in. Still convinced he was going to be able to drag the boat along the sand and onto the trailer Buck pulled out every available length of stainless steel rope I had in the hatch. The cables were attached to the hull and upper deck of the yacht at a number of points and the opposite ends were shackled to the ute. Buck gunned the engine of his utility up the slippery ramp in a skidding, cable snapping display of hard headed defiance and I watched the badly stressed hull crack open to expose my fiberglass repairs. With his frantic efforts he had only managed to drag the boat about three feet but he insisted he could get it with the next pull. I didn't feel like watching my dreamboat being destroyed any longer so I wished him luck with his new yacht and rode the Honda back to Hollywood. At sundown Bucks ute pulled into the yard and there was no boat in tow. That evening as the crew listened in I had to endure yet another of his hair brained schemes which involved a front end loader to pull the damaged boat off the sand. Not wanting to appear the doubting Thomas in front of his workers I wished him luck with the project in the most sincere vocal delivery I could fabricate. Things had really hit rock bottom between us since he became enslaved by his ice addiction and now I was saying things he wanted to hear just to keep the peace. He was still my host so I had to bite my tongue but I was counting the moments until I could split that uncomfortable scene forever.

The Honda had been a prized acquisition to compliment my life on a yacht lifestyle but with the unexpected changes it became more of a burden than an asset. In an act of decisive spontaneity I rode it into the local motorcycle dealer to see if I might sell it for what I had paid and I was to receive a pleasant surprise. The bloke said the motor sounded like it was in really good condition and he offered me three hundred bucks cash for it on the spot. We shook on the deal as the money was handed over and we both walked away happy with the transaction. Letting the bike go meant more to me than just losing a useful mode of transport. It was also the point at which I made a conscious decision not to buy anymore motorbikes in the future. Apart from the fact it made my supply runs a lot easier I had been riding for the pure exhilaration and danger that comes with bush bashing through the wetlands. In the time I owned it I had a number of close calls the worst of which involved a speeding car and would qualify as a near death experience. I had devised a plan where I would ride side saddle in the grass at the side of the road whenever I was traveling near bitumen. If I was quick enough to spot any cop cars on the highway I could easily start walking the bike with the engine running and they would be none the wiser. It was a great strategy in theory but in the early stages of learning how to travel side saddle at speed I almost lost my life. I had been traveling on the gravel shoulder of Taylors Beach Road for about two kilometres and satisfied I had mastered the art I pulled out onto the paved road. I was concentrating on getting into the normal riding position instead of paying attention to traffic coming the other way and it almost got me killed. I raised my eyes from the handlebar controls to see a speeding car with a teenage chick at the wheel and she was less than six feet from impact. I jerked the bars hard to the left and missed the front end of the speeding P plater by a gap so narrow I can't begin to describe it. The horrible feeling that lodged in the pit of my guts let me know exactly how close I had come to a bloody and mangled end. It was a feeling I had experienced in times past when I was a reckless, speeding teenager but back then it was just another adrenaline blast. I had aged considerably since and the feeling of having survived reactivated the self preservation workshop in my head. Among a million other considerations I started thinking about what would happen to Husky if I was carted off in an ambulance. A new mode of parental responsibility kicked in and I started consciously treasuring our every moment together like it was the very last. Hus and I did part company briefly one day when he wandered away from the camp on the scent of an in season bitch. I woke up to find him gone and fresh tracks told me he had gone off in the direction of Taylors beach. I fired up the Honda and rode into town as fast as I could, scanning the terrain for my stupid mut. As I neared the house where I suspected he might be there were a group of people talking out the front. A Council Ranger was among them and I could see Husky in the caged rear compartment of his car. The people who owned the female dog had called the council because Hus was being such a nuisance and it took a whole lot of sweet talking before I got him back. The Ranger handed me an official warning notice that said I had to get him registered and other than that no real harm had been done.

With the yacht and the motorbike gone I was left with what amounted to a far more transportable load that would fit into a hired trailer with the tinny strapped on top. If I scored the right ride I would be able to cover far greater distances than I ever could as the captain of a marooned sailboat and the possibility of getting back to the Northern rivers was high on my agenda. The Port Stephens area had been good to me through the years but circumstance was telling me it was time to hit the road. The vibes from Buck and his crew had become downright heavy because I wasn't part of their meth-amphetamine dependant network and they had me targeted as an outsider. I had known some of those deadbeat arseholes for more than twenty years. People hey! Why fucking bother? My stay at Hollywood came to an abrupt end when I returned to the truck and found the door had been forced and my camp was violently ransacked. The fishermen were the first possible culprits that came to mind when I spotted my gutting knife dug deep into the pillow on my bedroll. Nothing had been stolen however which caused me to wonder if it might have been someone else. The hired box trailer strategy got it's first official road test that very afternoon as I hastily emptied the truck of my stuff. John Macaulay a mate of mine who worked at the local bottle department offered his assistance when I told him about the knife in my pillow. There was no sign of Buck or any of his crew as we packed the load and his phone was still out of range by the time we left the lot. John agreed to tow my load all the way to the Hunter river in Newcastle where he would drop me off and then return with the car trailer to the Shell garage. He wouldn't take a red cent for petrol or his help and said he was more than glad to help. I often wonder if John was a Christian. When finally I made phone contact with Buck I was to discover it was in fact he who had busted into the truck. After a heated screaming match had subsided to more civil tones I was to hear how I had caused two thousand dollars worth of frozen lobsters to go rotten by turning off a fridge in the house. His cursing accusations soon fell silent as I informed him of the squashed and burnt out power cable I found under a recently installed spare parts rack. One of his workers had caused a short circuit and not informed him and I get the blame with a gutting knife stuck in my pillow. In my time I have heard some grizzly tales about how 'Ice' can fuck your mind and my one time friend 'Quickbucks' is evidence they are true. How does the most easy going and amiable guy you know become the most highly strung arsehole you've ever met? It just doesn't make any sense. Having fled the threat zone and happily camping on the banks of the Hunter River with Hus I was inspired by the knowledge I had survived to live another day. The incident with Buck was caused by a simple lack of communication but the knife in the pillow could very well have been a final warning from the stinky fishos. This fact alone was enough to convince me I had acted wisely in leaving. My policy has always been to seek new horizons if ever more than two threat factors share the same territory. I developed this strategy way back in my life after I read the Magus by John Fowls. He describes in the book how two men are playing dice and loser is required to swallow a lethal pill. One of the men throws the losing dice and when he is offered the pill he refuses it. Instead of insisting he takes it the other man commends his decision, claiming that cowardice is a mark of true intelligence. It wasn't so much cowardice that made me flee Port Stephens but the common sense knowledge that I was out numbered by those who wished me harm.

My campsite on the Hunter was situated at Sandgate on an artificial embankment of hardened slag from the BHP steelworks. The local anglers said the slag was originally put there to protect the mangroves but all it did was restrict the flow of water into the wetlands. I wouldn't mind betting those who ordered the slag to be poured stand to gain a fortune when the mangroves are all dead and the land is opened up for development. Fishing from the bank wasn't as plentiful as it had been in Port Stephens but I was still able to hook the odd catch if the line didn't get severed by protruding fingers of oyster covered slag. After the upheavals I had gone through since losing the yacht I reveled in the simple, daily delights of hunting for my dinner and exploring new territory. There were a couple of inlets just across the river from my camp where mudcrabs could be trapped by those prepared to brave a constant swarm of blood sucking mozzies. I gave it my best shot in the terrible conditions but eventually I gave up defeated. Just like the Sandflies in Cromitary bay I left the insects to their domain and retreated to my fly screened shelter.

'I'm getting too old for this shit'

A short bike ride from the Sandgate boat ramp I could connect with a main road that took me the twelve or so miles into Newcastle. The closest place to pick up supplies was the outer suburb of Mayfield and this is where more often than not I was able to score some weed. On the weekends if the mood took me I left Hus guard the camp and rode into Newcastle to check out the many corner pubs along the way. I discovered a number of unpretentious little drinking holes that had bands of my era playing in the front bar and they were spurred along by rowdy weekend crowds. I discovered a far better variety of nightlife options than I ever found in the Port Stephens area and it was a nostalgic treat to throw coins in a buskers case late in the evening. With each of the guitar strumming minstrals I encountered among the closing time drunks of Newcastle the ache grew inside me to do the same. The first time I spotted an old wino eating out of a garbage can in the city center I had a nostalgic flutter back to the Kings Cross days. My excitement at certain details of city life came as a revelation about where this new leg of the journey might be taking me. I had replaced an up market coastal retreat, with the hard core reality of low income, urban sprawl and I was digging it. Life was telling me to snap out of my Mosquito Coast fantasies and get as citified as I possibly could. But why? The only thing I could come up with was the idea that my boating adventures were something I had to get out of my system so I could re-awaken the street performer within. What an inspiring but truly daunting thought.

The practicalities of doing a show were outside the range of what my present reality allowed but a plan to come out of retirement became my New Years resolution as I partied with post punk groovers at the Cambridge hotel. They welcomed me into their fold with open arms and I received friendly embraces as the midnight hour came around. I camped on the banks of the Hunter River until I was adequately acclimatized to urbanity then I started making plans for a move closer to Sydney. After studying my tattered assortment of maps I concluded that the Central Coast was a good option because it was reasonably close to the metropolitan area yet far enough away to feel remote.

The township of Windsor on the Hawksbury River seemed like the best strategy I could pursue as it sits on the upper reaches of the Hawksbury and the mouth is at the Central Coast. If the river was unobstructed by man made barriers I might be able to explore its entire length in search of a new home. A disused boatshed would be the best thing I could possibly find but I was ready to settle for anything close to a place I could perform.

Will Smith is the most consistent of all of the old crew when it comes to staying in touch. He calls me up out of the blue from time to time just to say hi and see how I am doing. Often I have told him how much I appreciate the calls as they provide a sense of belonging I would not otherwise have. Right at the point where I was getting removalist quotes and preparing to leave the Hunter Will called and I gave him an earful about what I had been doing. He was angered to hear the yacht had been confiscated by the authorities and truly mortified when I told him I was driven out of the area by deranged fishermen. In his usual concern for my well being Will offered to drive from the Blue Mountains with his car trailer and take me to the boat ramp in Windsor. It was agreed that we would meet up at the Sandgate ramp in three days hence where I would be fully packed and ready to go.



READY TO LEAVE THE HUNTER

William and I were in contact on our mobiles from early up on the morning of our agreed meeting. He arrived at the Sandgate ramp about midday and after we had exchanged hugs he started taking snapshots of me and my load. On my request he took a shot of a passing coal train with a giant wind turbine spinning in the distance as our conversation changed from fishing stories to the perils of fossil fuels. After the trailer was loaded we headed off towards Windsor and it felt good to be catching up with him face to face. Telephones are great for exchanging vital information but nothing beats one on one interplay among friends. In the time since last we were together Will had become totally immersed in the role of the dutiful husband and father while I had become more feral and distanced from society.

It didn't feel we had drifted apart in the process however and our road trip was spiced with genuine laughter. Often is the case that when old companions from the freedom trail get hitched guys like me are forgotten. Unlike others I have known will appeared to be keeping his mind open to realities outside the square and the limitations of the daily grind.



CHAPTER TWELVE

BRRRRRRRR! BLOODY COLD

Forced by the prevailing circumstances I found myself in I was to take up residence on the high inland slopes and escarpments of the Blue mountains. After eighteen years away from the streetlife I came out of retirement from busking with an almighty bang sure to knock the snow off the pines in the valley below. Gone were my days of semi hermetic solitude around the bay and welcomed in were the days of wine and roses with mountain women who swooned to the melody of my songs. Folk clubs and night clubs, local pub open mike nights and everything in between were to become my regular haunts as I clicked in with the local muso population and carved a path as the busker with the 'big voice' from Adelaide. The cash started rolling in with my very first renewed attempts at street performance and it was due as much to Husky's teddy bear appeal with kids and old folks as it was by anything I was doing. I started recording new tracks with some of the best players the mountains have to offer and as I did I was throwing all of my spare cash into digital technology. My winter long stay in the alpine country was enough to convince me that I'm a sun and surf devotee through and through so with the melting snows of spring I came down from the mountains to try my hand wooing them in the big smoke.

ON THE HIGH GROUND

Because we had made such a late start leaving Sandgate it left little time for finding a suitable campsite when Will and I finally arrived in Windsor. The sleepy little riverside settlement I had passed through in days gone by was no more and the waterfront had been transformed into a haven for speedboat enthusiasts. At every location where I might be able to set up a camp there were private jettys and security fences, besides there were people everywhere. Will and I took stock of the situation in the fast fading light and it was agreed that a plan B was in order. He had long since used up his quota of free time away from the homefront and the stress was starting to show. To settle the vibes and keep our boys club adventure moving right along I allowed Will to convince me I should go back to the mountains with him and rethink my plans. He and his family lived in a pokey little cottage with no spare room but he said he had some friends at Wentworth Falls who might be able to put me up. Will spoke to his friends on the mobile as we drove off into the sunset towards the Blue Mountains. When he explained the situation I was in they said I could camp in the yard for a few days but I had to keep my dog well away from theirs. It was after dark when we pulled up in the driveway of the Wentworth Falls property and were greeted by our hosts. Jenny a woman of about my own age was someone I had met before on previous trips to the mountains and she shared the house with three young guys called Patty, Lewis and Oliver. I never found out exactly which of the young fellows were her sons but it didn't really matter because the whole household had a friendly, family vibe about it. Once in the house our initial chat over coffee and joints was ever so brief as I was intent on getting a shelter established and Will needed to get back to his family.

Hauling Husky and my bedroll by torchlight I was escorted along a short garden track that crossed a small bridge, near a pond. There was a large rotunda beside the pond which was offered up as my temporary accommodation and after bidding me a good night Lewis went back up to the house. It was certainly a great place to be but it wasn't until the morning I was able to appreciate the picturesque setting in which I had landed. There were giant goldfish in the pond hiding under large, floating lotus leaves and ducks were nuzzling for yabbies on the bank. It was a full time job getting Husky to relax in the presence of the assorted wildlife but eventually he learned that the fish and the ducks were not on his breakfast menu. Things were pretty relaxed and casual for the week or so that I camped by the pond and it reminded me of scenes I had passed through on the hippy trail. Jennys sons were busy most of the time with an internet marketing project and I hardly ever saw them during the day. Jenny and I smoked countless joints on an outside balcony overlooking the property and exchanged notes on the finer points of everything. There was no sexual attraction between us so we could just relax into the easy going, platonic flow of the moment. As I sat around chatting in the lazy, sunshine hours I felt I was being welcomed home to a world I lost touch with many moons ago. The unexpected turn of events in Windsor had delivered me to the gates of the great unknown and I celebrated the new path to adventure before me. I decided the best way to embrace my new list of challenges was to go more than ever with the flow and just try to recognise any opportunities it may bring. The first opening came when I found I was hanging out to go fishing and the most available option was the Wentworth Falls Lake. Immediately I loaded up the pushbike trailer with my bedroll, handlines and some basic camping gear then Husky and I set off for the lake. When we got there I set up a tarp shelter in a patch of thick bushes right near the waters edge. There were bushwalking tracks on either side of my camp but the scrub was thick enough to conceal us from public view. The word among the local anglers was that there were trout in the lake but for my whole stay in the area I didn't catch a single one or see any caught. I contented myself with buckets full of large yabbies that I harvested from under rocks near the embankments. A few days after I had settled in near the lake William called me up and said that my load was blocking the driveway at Jennys place. He said I had to find an alternative storage spot straight away and he would help me to get it there. The best option I could come up with was the garage of an ex girlfriend called Toni who was living on the outskirts of Katoomba.

When I came into the area Toni and I spoke briefly on the phone and it was all very chummy as it usually is when we reconnect. Once permission was given that I could store my gear in the shed Will took charge of the situation and moved it there in my absence. When next Will and I were to see each other he was picking me up from the side of the road a little way up from the lake. We loaded my camping gear and pushbike into the back of his van with Husky and myself in the front. So as to be close to the bulk of my load I set up a shelter in a stretch of native scrub directly opposite Toni's house. Among our normal flirtatious banter Toni and I attempted to reignite the old flame but my boat and all the other stuff cluttering up her shed was an obstacle. She hinted that she felt like a mere convenience as I nuzzled my face into her bare chest on the living room couch and it left me with an irretrievable soft on.

The vibes from then on were mixed but mostly strained so I made a special effort to keep the fuck out of her way. In any case I had to get working on a permanent home for my self and my dog which meant a fleeting sexual fling was a luxury I couldn't afford. I should have seen it coming and kept things strictly business but you don't think of things like that when Mr. Happy is trying to climb out of your pants.



TONI

My first big break came when I was having a cold one in Katoomba at the beer garden of the Carrington Hotel. I got speaking with the owner of a feisty young female ridgeback that Husky took a shine to. His name was Arn and as well as being an interesting bloke I was to learn he was the proprietor of a local antique store. His business was situated in the grounds of a disused hardware depot directly across from the Katoomba railway station. As the dogs barked and played Arn listened intently to the events leading up to my arrival in the mountains and he was quick to offer assistance. He said there was a section of his property that he assigned to guests and I was welcome to use it for a couple of weeks. My new host and I drank Coopers ale and further exchanged road stories as the beer garden filled up with a varied assortment of mountain folk and travellers. Arn was tribally connected to the most bohemian of those in attendance and it wasn't long before I was introduced to the local pot dealer. There was a group of teenage flower children strumming guitars and singing at the tables and for a couple of hours I was immersed in a mood of carefree oblivion. Being welcomed into Arns guest house was the most perfect thing that could have happened at that particular time. It was right in the centre of town and it provided the ideal base camp from which I could explore the area. The main building of the old hardware depot was nestled between the railway station and the blackberry covered walls of a main road overpass.

It was filled to the rafters with valuable antiques and collectables that Arn had accumulated and I was soon to nickname the place 'Retro Heaven'. He said the antique business was only a temporary thing and he eventually intended to finance the establishment of a free energy depot for the mountains. I said I thought it was a great idea in this the age of global warming and we raised our glasses to toast the free alternatives of the world. Arn was involved in a messy on off relationship with a nasty little bitch who I took an instant dislike to on our first meeting. She looked right down her nose at me from the word go and I can only put it down to the fact she thought I was some kind of threat to her control. In the evenings on the front porch of the showroom I shared what advice I could with Arn but the best I could come up with is "A bachelor is someone who didn't make the same mistake Once'. My new host and male bonding partner it seems was definitely a troubled soul but amid expressions of despair and hopelessness I still managed to get him to chuckle. At the lowest abyss of the realities Arn had confided in me I was to learn the details of his most pressing dilemma. The girlfriend had apparently been his saving angel when he was suicidal and locked away in a lunatic asylum. On his release from incarceration he had revised his will assigning all of his wealth and worldly possessions to her. He was now regretful of that action as he believed she was conspiring to get him back in a padded cell. He agreed it might be wise to rewrite his will when I suggested he could set up a trust fund for his alternative energy ideas.

From the first moment we arrived on the mountain slopes of Katoomba Hus and I went into a new mode of combined transit. He had done more than enough initial training pulling a load and now I needed him to assist me up the hillsides on the bike. I constructed a lightweight harness for him out of buckles and straps and as I did it occurred to me that we had arrived at the very situation which inspired me to name him 'Husky' in the first place. Once attached to the pushbike frame the new harness drew all of the power from the centre of his back and the system proved highly effective. He was so bloody strong that even when I was loaded up with supplies it didn't slow him down. We soon became a local attraction around Katoomba and people in cars could be seen smiling as we passed. On one of our many exploratory excursions around the township Hus and I came upon a disused workers cottage out along the old Bathurst road. Apparently it had been sitting there empty since they finished building the new highway and I was really surprised that nobody had moved in. It was situated in a fenced off nature strip between two main roads and it looked perfectly suited to my needs. My time as Arns guest was well and truly up and I detected a hint of relief when I told him I had found a new place. I had coped reasonably well with the fact my new friend was a depressive but the vibes coming from his girlfriend were too unpleasant to be around. On the morning of the following day Arn and I picked up the boat and everything else from out of Toni's shed and loaded them into his car trailer. Toni invited us to stay for dinner which we did and the background music was a CD of romantic songs I had given her way back when. It was a pleasant enough parting scene for her and I even though it was dominated by Arn's emotional problems.

In the time I stayed there the workers hut was to prove the most significant and practical campsite I had occupied since being on the yacht. It was situated on the only stretch of flat land in the whole Katoomba area and I had really landed on my feet as it relates to pushbike travel. Hauling batteries and getting supplies in was no great obstacle as Hus and I did our daily runs into town. In the first couple of days after our arrival I had a deal worked out with the owner of a backpackers hostel that I could run a battery charger and take showers when needed at a moderate fee. In a daily ritual of riding over to the Flying Fox and replacing flattened batteries with fully charged ones I had enough energy to power the hut for all my assorted needs. The hostel was called the Flying Fox and it was like a little piece of Byron Bay perched on the blue tinged mountain escarpment. There were always young travellers hanging around in the outside barbecue shelter where I charged my batteries and all of them wanted to score some pot. Most of the kids were guitar players and spontaneous jam sessions were common place day and night. I had unlimited opportunities to let loose and they all seemed to approve of what I was coming out with. Singing with the young travellers was fun but more importantly it got me back into the swing of being a performer. Other than boosting my income with numerous pot transactions the backpackers were to prove helpful in the final production of my albums. A couple of them had laptop computers with them and they were happy to burn multiple reproductions from my master CD's. The album masters had evolved to the best they had ever sounded and by the end of our disc burning sessions I had a swag of original recordings I could sell as part of my planned busking debut in Katoomba. On top of their kind help the backpackers ended up purchasing four of the newly produced cds and they insisted on paying the full price of twenty bucks. I didn't feel too bad about the bonus eighty dollars because they were obviously rich kids with family supplemented travel budgets. Since arriving in Katoomba I had made friendly connections with the local buskers and it was through them I found out about an open mike night at the Family Hotel. With two guitarists known as Big Stuart and young Matt accompanying me we did a basic twelve bar blues jam and received a rowdy applause. For the whole time we were on stage playing there was a very intoxicated but harmless punter cheering us on from the dancefloor. At the conclusion of our unrehearsed blues song he staggered up to me and started frantically shaking my hand. He smelled worse than the ancient pub carpet as he mumbled something about Muddy Waters in my ear.



ON STAGE AT THE FAMILY HOTEL IN KATOOMBA

I allowed the drunk to continue hugging and slobbering all over me however as there was a fresh twenty buck note being squashed into my open mit. I bought drinks all around for the lads then we laughed and jammed on the blues into the night. It seemed the Mountains had become a mecca for many of the faces that used to frequent inner city Sydney during the eighties. At just about every turn I spotted a head that was familiar and with just a little probing shared histories were unearthed. A couple of days after the Family pub night I ran into an old busking acquaintance called Alvin who had made Katoomba his home. After remembering who each other was Alvin said "Hey man if you go busking in this town you are going to clean up". Wow! That was all I needed to hear to get motivated. My first public performance in Katoomba had proved both satisfying and profitable and I saw it as a good omen for things to come. Followed so closely by Alvin's encouraging statement I was positive I had dropped anchor in the best spot possible for my busking come back. The self image of myself as a free roaming riverboat captain was lost among a host of rapid changes and the clothes I wore started to take on a folk musician tone. Regularly I rummaged through the local op shops in search of the right attire and after much experimentation I looked well suited to the part I was ready to play. The first thing I had to do was get started on building an amplification rig that could be incorporated into my existing bike trailer. The original trailer was to experience a host of new innovations as I got working to convert it into a multi purpose unit. The final result saw my dated guitar amp strapped into a commercial fish tub that was attached to the frame of an old golf buggy. A twenty watt power amplifier drove the system which included my microphone and digital delay. The musical backing tracks I intended to use were fed into the amp from an old but reliable Sony Walkman and the end result was not at all unpleasant to the ear. On completion of the new busking trolley I was keen as mustard to do the first show and that's exactly when the dirty weather set in. I had to spend five days just sitting around twiddling my thumbs in awful mists and drizzle before the first hint of sunlight started to warm the slopes. I didn't have a clue where I was going to do my first show as Husky and I set off towards town. It was my first official road test for the towing of the busking trolley and I was only concerned about getting it there without incident. As we were nearing the highway overpass that overlooks Arns place I noticed a number of people had gathered and were looking down to where it sits. Thinking it must be the day of the antique auction sale he had mentioned I pulled over to take a look. I was greeted by an image of horror. All that was left of the main house was a smouldering, burnt out shell that had caved in on itself and attending fire patrols were still hosing it down. Shocked by what I saw I asked one of the spectators what had happened and he said the guy who lived there had torched the place during the night. The firemen had to hose the building down from outside of the property because Arn had blocked the only entrance with his car before he incinerated himself. Holy fuck. Arn. Gone forever. What a terrible waste of life. And what a bad time to receive the news just as I was preparing to hit the main street and sing cheerful ditties to the townsfolk.

I was shaken and upset by what I had seen but instead of wallowing in pointless morbidity I made a snap decision that 'The show must go on'. In some eyes it might not have been the most respectful thing to do but it offered a perfect opportunity to test my skills of emotional control. If I could plod on regardless after such a horrific shock to the system then nothing the future could dish up would phase me. I set up the music equipment near the entrance to the Carrington beer garden and sitting on a milk crate I started to go through the sets. The backing music I had compiled for the show was mostly up tempo with light and romantic lyrics so it wasn't too hard to slip into the mood. A group of backpackers from the Flying Fox gathered around clapping and throwing coins which brought a welcomed distraction from the hovering ghost of Arn howling through my brain. That was the first busking performance I had done since the late eighties and all things considered it went well. I was able to stay at it for about three hours before a thick mist set in but I had made enough money to afford a celebratory bottle of scotch. As I was counting the coins I had a nostalgic flashback to earlier times with friends laughing and joking around me while we split up the takings. My following shows proved more profitable than the first after I worked out the best location for busking in the wintry alpine climate. It was the indoor ramp area of the Woolworths and K Mart shopping complex just off the main street. There's a certain spot on the ramp near the carpark entrance where heat dispursed from the building gathers in a warm vortex. I did a couple of shows while it was snowing outside the carpark and held my own against the chill. Husky sat on a blanket near the money case just out of the way of shopping trolley wheels and he was the main focus of everyone's attention.



ALL IN A DAYS WORK

As well as being a powerful and majestic working dog he is also a real good looking and as playful as a two month old pup. If the truth were known Hus was and still is the main feature of our busking shows wherever we happen to be. Well to do old ladies pushing shopping trolleys made a special point of saying 'This is for your doggy' as they dropped five and ten dollar notes in the case. Many left the supermarket loaded up with cans and large packets of dry dog food and they would be laid at my feet with big smiles as I merrily sang my songs. At first my earnings ranged from thirty to fifty dollars a day but before the winter was over I was averaging eighty to a hundred and twenty dollars a day. I was quick to learn that small children perched on trolleys are the best target for bringing in the bikkies. Once a very young toddler is held transfixed by the sound and movement of the show it stops the whole family in their tracks. Parents look down adoringly at their infant who might be showing the first responses to music and everything follows a logical progression after that. The mothers start digging around for their purses among the shopping load and coins are given to older children to throw into the case. When others see this happening the old 'Monkey see monkey do' syndrome kicks in and it can turn into a congested line of family groups and others rallying to have their turn. I didn't need any more proof than this that regional shopping centres and malls are the optimum venue for buskers. They are the modern equivalent of the village market square and a friendly place to be in an alienated world. Situations like carpark entrance had to be the most profitable because the performer is dealing with a captive audience. From the moment the shoppers start moving down the ramp towards until they drive away they are exposed to the music of the performer. While loading the boot with groceries they have a few moments to absorb the sound and often is the case they will throw money when they return the trolley to the rack.

Because the cement structure of the building did such a good job of amplifying the music I had to keep the volume on my portable sound system right down. People will let you know if they feel they are being blasted and no inspiration can come from singing your heart out to frowns and covered ears. In the early busking days no form of amplification was ever used. The only time I got to sing through a microphone was in studio situations or jamming around the pubs. A highly perfected microphone technique became the new skill added to my list of achievements and I grew increasingly more confident with each show. The vast majority of passers by were receptive to what I was doing but there are always those who aren't and they don't hesitate to let you know it. Amid my cheerful ditties I would receive the odd comment like 'Why don't you get a proper job?' or "Stop blocking the fucking doorway". I guess that sort of thing just comes with the territory.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN



THE THING WITH THE INSATIABLE MARIJUANA HABIT

Well so much for the quality time I was going to be spending with just little old me for the next few days. Joe used up all of his last remaining chances on my camping trip when he crushed my thumb in the transom clamp on the outboard motor. He lifted the shaft prematurely as I was doing battle with a stuck lever and I still can't use my thumb properly, five days after the event. Along with Joe's sub-standard assistance I've cancelled all services with my care provider for the next week, other than with dominic the techno wizz kid, who is getting the electrics in my recording studio ship shape. Then Shazzam! As it always happens, a relatively new 'old mate' called Glyne comes barging back into my world with a friend request on facebook and we've arranged to hook up tomorrow after lunch. Whenever Glyne pops back on the scene after long stretches away he normally smokes all of my weed and I listen to his big plans and hair brained schemes, then he vanishes again without a trace for another long stretch. I nicknamed him 'Wonder boy' because I'm forever wondering where the fuck he is after we've made arrangements to meet. He's the last remaining element of chaos that I allow to remain in my life because he's a funny bastard who can always get a chuckle out of me. Old mate Glyne is also an Iraqi war vet with a short wick and being around him reminds me of the times I shared with the old nightclub bouncer crew I used to hang out with in the Kings Cross days. Since my business partner Imran went off the Scene the 'Steve's Boatyard' enterprise has become just a pile of unfinished repairs and expired on line classifieds. I'm half hoping if I offer a 50% share of the business he will get it up and running again and make us both some bucks. Only time will tell I guess.



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A RETURN TO THE STREET LIFE

It was about nine thirty at night when the front door of the hut was bombarded by large rocks courtesy of passing teenagers. This was the first assault of three that saw me brandishing a loaded speargun at the front gate and Husky showing his true worth as my protector. In evaluating the situation I concluded that the hut must have been a secret hangout for the local young trouble makers prior to my arrival. They would have seen me as just some old hobo who was getting in the way. The safest and most sensible thing to do was relocate my camp so I scanned my list of options for the best possible outcome. Captain Casual was the first to come to mind among my mountains based friends. He took up residence in Katoomba after the property at Hazelbrook was lost to his creditors and he has established a scaled down and more sustainable operation. I became a regular feature at the new Planet Savers headquarters and it replaced the Flying Fox as the spot where I charged my batteries. Early in the game I befriended a twenty seven year old horticulturist called Michael who was living with the Captain and volunteering his services around the property. On hearing of my dramas at the hut Michael allowed me the use of a street level car shed for a mere fifty dollars a week. It was a solid brick structure that had a working roller door but the most wonderful feature was the electrical power switch on the wall. Like some kind of power hungry, energy craving parasite I extracted leads and power boards from my load and plugged them in at great speed. My flight case protected mobile studio was ignited to life and I went into a grid connected, creative power burst. Michael let me use a pot belly stove that he owned and it became the central hub of my world through the winter months. Many a time he would pop out to bum some pot or cigarettes off me and he would comment that my setup was warmer than his in the house. Michael was a struggling new age zealot with an impressive list of planet saving degrees but he couldn't get a job anywhere in the mainstream work environment. He was battling to afford fuel for his car and I was making good money at the shows so he was happy to be my part time taxi service. On sunny days Hus and I pulled the busking trolley to the gigs because it was good for the townsfolk to see him working. This factor was a large part of the novelty and many who threw coins said they had seen him pulling me along the highway. If the weather was dirty Michael simply loaded the trolley into the back of his car and drove me and Hus into the carpark. After the shows back at Planet Savers headquarters we would be joined by his supermodel class girlfriend and chummy little dinner parties would unfold. Her name was Maya and she was the most delectable twenty year old love child that any old fart could wish to behold.

The young sweethearts welcomed me into their hearts and minds like a long lost uncle and I was honoured to be their friend. We attended a number of festive gatherings at the Katoomba Community Gardens of which Michael was a key organiser and I got to meet all of the local freaks. Among them were a couple known as Johnno and Meredith and they were to become my regular pot suppliers. Meredith was a fat and happy aboriginal woman with a golden smile and Johnno her whitey boyfriend was an old school hippy prankster. As August came around I dropped hints about my forthcoming fiftieth birthday to all who entered my den for a complimentary smoke. The list included Johnno and Meredith, the lovers, Young William, Stewart and Matt and a host of others who would make the party complete. The piano bar of the Carrington was chosen as the venue and as the night progressed it turned into fun for all. I was presented with a candle lit birthday cake by Michael and Maya which had a big five and a zero perched on the top. It was a very touching moment.



With the decline of his financial independence Captain Casual withdrew from the world to a darkened room and a blinking computer screen. Michael revealed that he was only surviving from week to week on welfare payments with the odd handouts from his wealthy younger brothers. All the bills were being paid to keep the Planet Savers operating but it was a much different story to the excesses of days gone by. Our good Captain was so down in the dumps that he started divulging thoughts of suicide to those around him and anyone else who would listen. It brought the whole vibe of the place tumbling down and got me thinking seriously about my next move. William, Michael and myself had all been friends of Arn before he killed himself and there was still a strong sense of loss among us. It was agreed by all that we didn't want to see the Captain go the same way as we mulled over the problem and conversed about his fragile state of mind. The general consensus was that our patriarch felt as bankrupted in spirit as he was in dollars and cents and he had started psycho dramatizing an inner sense of failure. By threatening to end his life he was holding those dearest to him to emotional ransom and it was nothing more than a self indulgent plea for sympathy. Late in the night huddled around the pot belly stove we concluded that the Captain was out of the danger zone because more often than not those who talk about killing themselves rarely ever do.

The Planet Savers building went into renovations and the shed I had been occupying was needed for storage. I had seen it coming well in advance of the crunch so my backup plan went into action with the new day. I had recently bumped into an old mate called Phil Gray who I knew from Melbourne and he was renting a house close to town. With Phillips permission and Michaels help I moved out of the first shed into the second in a matter of hours. My new habitat was not half as cosy as the last but I was still connected to the electricity grid and that was all that mattered. My new address was much closer to the carpark than the previous dwelling had been.

Husky and I had to expend a lot less energy transporting the equipment to and from the gigs and as a result I was able to do more shows. The temptation was definitely there to blow my earnings in the pubs and late night bars so I invested in a swag of digital technology starting with a new laptop computer. The quest to break free of obsolete, analogue devices became my new mission in life and greatly improved audio quality would be the final reward. Phil Gray my most recent host in the mountains was an all round musician who played guitar, keyboards, drums and sang. He had all the talent in the world but it took second place to the alcohol cravings that emptied his wallet and eventually pickled his brain. The spare room he had converted into a home studio was full of state of the art recording gear that was sitting idle and gathering dust. He had a strict rule about nobody else touching his equipment yet he was incapable of putting the bottle down long enough to switch it on. There were numerous occasions where he babbled on about cleaning up my music beds and recording new vocal tracks but it never came to pass. The closest thing I saw to any kind of progress was the day he attempted to connect a microphone to the tone processor in one of his drunken stupors. Lost in a tangled mountain of cables and leads he conversed intently to himself about what lead goes where and where the fuck his gaffer tape was. The cable remained unconnected as he staggered from the scene on the scent of another beer. I was grateful for Phil's hospitality but Arns death had instilled a new sense of caution when it comes to bonding with loose cannons. Letting him go his own drunken way I just kept to myself, ever vigilant that my household bills were paid. The shed became unsustainable when a neighbour complained to Phil that they had heard me cursing. I had spilled a cup of coffee on my butane cooker and it soaked the jets, which triggered some colourful language. In more sober moments I was told by Phil that I could occupy the empty sunroom at the front of the house for the remainder of my stay. This represented an immediate quantum leap in creature comforts and a far more civilised environment to sit out the Katoomba winter. The swearing incident was nothing to worry about but Phil was afraid the neighbours would inform his landlord. Intoxicated to his normal fill he went staggering into their yard with a posy of flowers in hand. He presented them with the flowers at the front door and went on to apologise on my behalf about the swearing. I was sitting at the dining room table chopping up some buds when I overheard the nearby conversation. The neighbours said it was not a problem and they displayed extreme discomfort at the babblings of the piss tank from next door who they barely even knew. Phil stumbled back into the house all puffed up by his accomplishment and I acted like I didn't know a thing when he said a tricky conflict situation had been resolved.

'Poor Shmook'



The winter equinox was due with the new moon and preparations for the annual winter magic festival were in full swing. Many of the townsfolk I had met were involved and the whole village seemed to be buzzing with anticipation as the big day drew close. The weather was picture perfect for the event and I was up with the birds to secure a good busking spot. Crowds assembled in great numbers on the main street and by mid morning it was shoulder to shoulder all the way. Not happy with the spot I had chosen I attempted to manoeuvre my rig through the mass of humanity and that's when the trouble began. An irregular bulge had appeared in my groin some time back and the diagnosis was confirmed as a hernia. In the months I had to wait around for the operation I got by with a strap I devised to hold my guts in but if the truth were known I should have been taking it easy. When I attempted to get the buggy up some steps I doubled over with pain and there was an urgent need for me to sit down. I was wrestling the trolley up the last few steps and moaning when I caught the eyes of someone I knew. Walking towards me in the other direction was Margaret the sister of Elizabeth and the aunty of Miranda. The whole clan was there including Beth and it was one of the most uncomfortable situations I think I have ever had to endure. Miranda wasn't with them. The fact I was in severe pain served as a valuable distraction amid awkward greetings and I was truly relieved to get away. Margaret was the only one from the group who came over to where I was sitting and after some light chatter she said something that took me by complete surprise. She told me that the family had been speaking about my environmental musical and they all agreed that the idea was ahead of it's time. What a mind blower. I was only capable of engaging in a brief conversation before I scribbled down my mobile phone number and left the festival in search of medical help.

Nearly busting my pooper at the festival served to fast track the hernia operation and after an overnight stay in the Katoomba Hospital I was confined to an easy chair. The understanding with Phil was such that I would vacate the sunroom after my operation and he wasted not a nano second in reminding me of this fact the moment I started showing signs of getting well. I guess my motivated and enthusiastic presence made him feel like a time wasting wanker. He had turned into an absolute drag to be around and I was yearning for the return of my domestic independence. The most memorable part of my stay in his house was the Christmas period because that was when Miranda called the number I had given to Margaret. I was pushing a trolley through the aisles in the local shopping centre when I received a text message wishing me a merry Christmas. I immediately called the number attached to the message and exchanged friendly, festive season chatter with one so badly missed and now all growed up. I was having a private little cry near the health food section as I learned that my princess was in the advertising game and about to attend a work seminar in Chicago.

It would appear the planets and all of the stars were in some kind of convergence as it relates to bonding with my offspring. Within days of my connection with Miranda I had an unexpected visit from my other daughter Kianna, in the company of her mother Alicia. It was a sunny day and I was busking on the main street when I saw the two of them drive by. Once Alicia had located a parking spot they came over to where I was and it was hugs and kisses all around. Alicia said they had made a spontaneous decision to make Katoomba their holiday destination in the hope they might bump into me. And so they did. Alicia has a long time girlfriend in the area who offered to put them up so for about a week we got to goof around. I broke into song for Kiaana on numerous occasions and it was a delight to discover she knew all the words to my songs. I had forgotten that I gave Alicia some early recordings and it was from these that my twelve year old daughter had learned the words. She also loved Husky to pieces and before they left the mountains Kiaana insisted that I send her some shots of him as a puppy. Within minutes of seeing Kiaana and Alicia in the main street of Katoomba I also reconnected with Steve Wall a muso mate from the nightclub days in Sydney. Like I said something weird was happening in the psychic stratosphere. Steve had collaborated on some of my early recordings and I sang vocals on a couple of his. Our meeting was the springboard to a series of events involving old crew reunions and it allowed me access to a fully rigged, state of the Art studio. The lads got me to recite some of my poetry over ambient music beds they had constructed and we captured some innovative stuff in the process. The lads all had families and day jobs to attend to so work on the re-recording of my music beds never eventuated.

Directly opposite the entrance to the underground carpark where I was doing most of my shows I discovered an empty house. All of the doors and windows were locked tight but there was a downstairs laundry area left unsecured and begging for occupation. With the bulk of my load tarped over in the front yard at Phils place I set up camp in the laundry which was similar to the entrance to a mine. I was delighted to discover that the power was still connected and it brought four days of free usage before being mysteriously cut off. When the power went it was no great obstacle because I had located a power point in the carpark where I could run a charger undetected. With such an easily accessible energy supply I turned into a gluttonous movie buff with a five DVD a day habit. Being in such close proximity to the place I performed made the logistics of doing a gig much easier. Less than ten minutes after the decision to go busking I was all set up and working. Entertaining the Christmas shoppers lifted my income to an average of one hundred and fifty dollars a day and contributions were often followed by a cheerful "Merry Christmas". The vast majority of those passing were friendly in their manner but there was a minor percentage who expressed open hostility for reasons unknown. There is a significant population of fliptops in the Katoomba area and for some reason I had been singled out as a target for their theatrics. Mid song I would find myself the focus of some deranged individual who was standing over me and verbalising incoherent babble. It eventually became such a nuisance that had to recruit a bodyguard from among the local, street level tough guys. His name was Simmo and he was one of the most fearsome looking blokes in town. Whenever he was around the fruit loops kept their distance and I got to sing without any hindrance.

There's a healthy busking community in Katoomba who fill every available doorway as they compete for contributions. At times when I arrived in the carpark I had to wait around while another performer finished their shift. On one such occasion I was being sent to sleep by a violin player when a professional looking photographer arrived on the scene and set up his equipment. He took countless shots of the violin player and then he came over to talk to me. His name I found out was Peter Adams and he was documenting the mountain buskers for a book he was compiling called 'The Streetwise'. I claimed the space where the violin player had been working and Peter merrily snapped away as I went through my sets. A few days later Peter picked Husky and I up and we were taken to his very luxurious home studio for more shots and an interview about my life as a street performer. When the last of the photographic sessions were done Peter presented me with a CD containing all of the best shots and they still remain a treasured reminder of my time on those freezing alpine slopes.



THAT'S MY BOY



THERE HE IS LIVING UP TO HIS NAME

Katoomba was a cool scene to be part of for a while but the unending pain in my lower back was telling me I had to get out of the mountains and return to the coastal flatlands. As well as being my most regular weed suppliers Johnno and Meredith had also become trusted friends. Their flat was in an area nicknamed the Redfern of Katoomba and it was the most frequented hangout of street level operators like myself. Even if I didn't need to score any pot I used to go there just to drink and talk with the local maniacs and misfits. It was a rich and exhilarating scene that I was familiar with from times passed. At one of the daylong bong sessions in Little Redfern I got yakking with a bloke called Dazza who did removals on the side. He was a highly strung extrovert druggie like most others there and it wasn't easy to pin him down to any specific details. Amid the din of the household and endless distractions to our conversation I managed to extract a quote for two hundred bucks for my next move. Dazza said it would cost that much because he had to tow the trailer with a gas guzzling V8 engine. All going well the fee he had requested would see me out of the mountains and relocated to Manly on Sydney's northern beaches so I had to agree to his exorbitant terms.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN



'I GOTTA GET MY SCRIPT MAAAAH!'

Most of the seeds I germinated back in the middle of winter have remained as stunted little runts that are showing absolutely no sign of going into a vegetative growth curve any time soon. As you would expect the few that I sprouted closer to spring are up and running and I'm having to make changes out in the courtyard to conceal their tell tale fronds from the upstairs neighbours. The two that are powering along most successfully are a different, more potent strain to the others and I am nurturing them to go into a sunny garden plot where they will be mostly camouflaged by tall, healthy stalks of corn. I'm pretty certain they are both female and I'm expecting a substantial yield, which will give me a break from all the hydroponic shit I've been choofing on. The last stick up deal I bought from the drunks down at the lake was weird gangster dope that had been sprayed with some sort of chemical agent. Whatever it was it acts like a retardant so when you try to get it burning it's like trying to ignite wet straw. Even after I had chopped up a nugget free mix of the hydro and some bush weed with scissors I still found myself having to relight joints that were constantly fizzing out. So while we're on the subject of drug fucked, piss tank, low life fuckheads, my ride from the mountains to the sea was facilitated by just such a 'waste of space', dumbfuck individual. I can't say that I wouldn't wish this guy on my worst enemy because I'd be lying. He'd be perfect for the job.



Merrily, Merrily, Merrily, Merrily,...

LIFE IS BUT A, LIVE STREAM!

I knew Dazza was a wild card but by the end of our contract I was convinced he was a dangerous motherfucker that I didn't want to be around one minute longer than I had to. Throughout the loading and unloading of my stuff from the mountains to the sea he dominated the procedure and he was big enough to get away with it. I had to fall in with his plans every step of the way which included an overnight stay at the house of someone reported to be a friend. The guy who owned the house at Bowlgowlah heights had been imposed on and it showed in the way he frowned at Dazza's overbearing ways. I layed out my bedroll in the back yard and at first light I was woken by a poking finger and King fuckwit standing over me. He said that we had to get to Manly straight away so he could pick up some methadone at the hospital.

When we arrived in Manly a short while later he outlined a plan where I was expected to wait around for him at the hospital before we unloaded the gear. I found myself involved in a full scale battle of wills that tinkered on threats to my personal safety but eventually I got my way. At the first available parking spot near the water Dazza skidded the car to a stop and I emptied the trailer of my things. He sped off towards the methadone clinic without a backwards glance and I felt truly blessed to be rid of him. My load was scattered all over the pavement and the only possible stash spot was behind a public toilet just along the beach from the Manly Warf. I was relieved to find a vacant space between the toilet block and a high sandstone wall which I filled with everything but the tinny. I had been forced by circumstance to go camping in open view of the public so I had to create the most undetectable shelter I could. The grass area directly in front of the toilets is where small sailboats are pulled off trailers on the weekends and I recognised this an opportunity to execute my plan. The makeshift shelter I devised saw my bedroll stretched out longways under the propped up tinny with the butane cooker and portable TV beside it. When I removed the supporting pole it became just another overturned dinghy in a spot often used for boating activities. The council rangers were my most immediate concern but if I could make it through the weekend I might be able to relocate to a more sustainable spot.

A major bonus connected to my new campsite was the fact there was an unlocked power box behind the toilets. Driven by a concealed power cable I could sit on the upturned tinny working on the laptop and wet a line at the same time. The weekend passed and I was happy to see that some of the sailboats remained at my campsite on their trailers. This gave me valuable time to scout the surrounding area for anything that might resemble a permanent campsite. Husky and I did daily bike trips in search of vacant land near the water and the most appropriate location I found was on the banks of the Manly lagoon. Between the water of the lagoon and a large sports field I discovered a stretch of bush that was perfectly suited to my needs. There was a busy golf course across the water but behind the cover of thick scrub our campsite was mostly out of view. Hus and I had to do a number of trips from the toilet block to the lagoon with the bike trailer fully loaded but eventually we were settled in our new camp. I had completed a rough but successful move from alpine slopes to the coast so I started making up for lost time with fishing. From all reports the lagoon is too polluted to consider eating anything that's caught but it was fantastic to be wetting a line anyway. There were schools of mullet and bream moving through the tidal flow and flathead could be landed near the sandier banks. The best catch I made was a dirty great bull mudcrab that got tangled in one of my multiple hook lines. He was so fighting fit and healthy I disregarded my concerns about pollution and threw him in a boiling pot anyway. A bloody mudcrab in Manly. Amazing.

I was spared the need for battery runs when I found I could pry open the power box at the change rooms of the sports ground. At night when the last of the joggers and dog walkers had gone I was able to slip the charger plug in behind a bendable cover and suck free power off the grid. I filled my fresh water container from a tap in the toilets and garbage was easily disposed of in the bins out the front. On a return trip to the beach in Manly I found the Council Rangers had discovered my tarped over load behind the toilets. An official note had been left saying ... "Camper, remove your belongings from this site or your things will be taken to the tip". Slightly panic struck I sprang into action with no idea of what to do other than recruit the first available owner of a vehicle. My opening came when I spotted one of the councils garden attendants I had spoken with a couple of days earlier. His name was Brucie and he had told me where I could score pot in the area. As he tended to his chores I informed him of the rangers note and asked if his services were for hire. They were and after the geraniums were watered we loaded up his work ute with my stuff. The tinny took up most of the available space in the ute so only my most needed things were included in the load. The two roadcases containing my music equipment were spared but the rest of my gear was off to the local tip. Brucie only wanted twenty bucks for his trouble and that was fine by me because I was down to my last reserves of cash. To avoid the risk of having to deal with any council officials or police I invested my remaining forty dollars in a busking permit and prepared to hit the street. My first show on the Manly Corso was a real make it or break it situation because if I didn't make any money we weren't going to eat that evening. I remember my first performance clearly because the takings were exactly forty dollars. The same amount I had paid for the permit. We eat.

The move from Katoomba brought with it a noticeable reduction in income and I had to really tighten my belt to get through. The familiarity of performing in a small mountain community was gone and I was left to deal with the disinterested apathy of a fast moving, big city crowd. If I managed to scrape together thirty bucks after four sets it was a good day and to receive a friendly smile was a reward no price can measure. The well to do residents of Manly have their heads so well and truly up their own arses they wouldn't know authentic folk culture if it fell on them. Of course there were the local freaks like Brucie and others of his ilk who were happy to chew the fat and buy the next round if need be. The most significant connection I made was a good old boy called Blair who I knew from my time in the Eastern suburbs. Blair was always at the bar of the London Tavern which was the place we used to go after busking at Paddington markets. We did many an impromptu concert in the back bar so Blair knew many of my friends by name. He and I laughed about earlier times, in another age, where tomorrow was lifetimes away. I became increasingly disinterested in busking in Manly with each low paying show I did. On one occasion I got so pissed off with being ignored I packed up and went home after just three songs. I had to concede that it was not the place for a hail damaged old rocker like me when I witnessed a busking rap dancer being showered with money and adoration. It looked like there was about three hundred bucks in his case and he was being revered by the audience like he was some kind of fucking genius. You win buddy. I'm leaving. In a place where mediocrity rules brilliance is invisible, so I decided the rich folk of Manly didn't deserve me.

'Out with the maps again'

One afternoon as I was returning from a beer run I stopped to help a guy who was wrestling a garden slasher into the back of a ute. His name was Armin and he was grateful for my assistance. I rode off without mentioning the fact I might be in need a utility in case he thought I only helped out for my own ends. The next time I saw Armin in his front yard I offered him one hundred dollars to transport my load to Botany Bay and he agreed. We established a plan of action where I would meet him the following day with my load stacked and ready for departure near the skateboard ramps. The only directions I could give Armin as we neared the Sydney airport terminal was the Cooks River which comes off Botany Bay at the runways. Once in the right vicinity we found a spot where I could set up my camp in a recreation park between the Tempe railway station and the Princess highway. I thanked Armin for his help before he drove away then I set up my bedroll under the tinny camping layout. There were a few houses on a cul de sac just across the park but it didn't look like the kind of place any rangers would patrol. I only intended to stay in the park for one night and I would be gone before any of the locals could complain. With the dawn I put the tinny in the water loaded up with gear I intended to stash on the other side of the Cooks River. Beyond the mangroves directly across from where I had spent the night there was a vacant lot with tall grass in every direction. Ideal for what I needed. The load when tarped over was completely out of view among the long grass and the only possible spot it might be seen from was a platform at the Wolli Creek station.

My ingenious stash spot was located in an unused corner of the Sydney metropolitan area where people seldom ever go. The fuel system on the outboard motor had been giving me trouble before I left Manly and when I attempted to fire it up in the new surroundings it didn't want to budge. Giving up in disgust I stashed the motor with the rest of my load and I had to row the length of the river assisted by the tides. With my burden reduced considerably it was time to go micro camping and explore the Cooks River in the tinny. I had to find the most sustainable place I could to establish a camp and winter was closing in so it had to happen soon. The street directory map I had of the airport showed Alexandra canal which looked like the best spot to take shelter from the fierce Botany Bay winds. There were rain clouds about as I rowed into the man made canal and they broke into a heavy downpour as I tied up under the disused road bridge I had marked on the map. The rains continued on and off for days and the canal bridge provided barely adequate cover from the elements.



AS GOOD AS IT GETS

To get some relief from the blasting winds I pulled the dinghy under the concrete structure as far as it could go. I had to clear away a mountain of bottles and other floating litter that had washed up onto the clay embankment then I stretched my bedroll out in the tinny. Tarps were suspended all around the boat to block out the wind and contain endless drips coming off the concrete above. In the change rooms of a sports ground just over the way I discovered hot showers that could be accessed in the daylight hours. This luxury in itself was enough to make me like the area in spite of the fact I was yet to locate a place to charge my batteries. While I sat out the weather I fished the canal and the only catch I made was a halfway decent bream. There was a warning sign nearby that said the canal contained toxic sediment so I let the fish go not wanting to risk a gastric upset.

During the time I was sitting out the rains I turned from my fishing to see a bearded young man with a camera standing on the slope. He introduced himself as Dean and said that he was a freelance photo journalist. Dean asked if I would mind him taking a few shots of my campsite to which I agreed. Every aspect of my lifestyle was of interest to him and our conversation soon went from my present reality to the journey that had got me there. He loved it when I said I like to describe myself as a 'River Gypsy'. After I had given a brief account of my travels Dean proposed that I would make ideal subject matter for a photo journalism exhibition he was planning to be part of. It sounded like a good opportunity to acquire some free shots of my stay on the Cooks River so I gladly offered my support. Dean would often pop up at the oddest times. Like the time he turned up at the very moment I caught a big bream or moments after I had been thinking of him.

From my camp the closest available bottle department was the Harp Hotel which is just up on the Princess highway. It wasn't too far to walk and sometimes I took Hus up with me to get my beer. The pub had been restored with an Irish theme by the new owners who were a jolly lot in a constant happy hour mood. Outside of the traditional Irish music the backroom was a popular rock and roll watering hole frequented by a young, drug crazed audience. On one of my beer runs I picked up a free music magazine and threw it in the bag with my beer. I knew that a friend of mine was hosting an open mike night somewhere in Sydney and I intended to scan the magazine to see where it was happening.

Dennis Aubrey for those who have not read the first book was my busking partner in Adelaide when I made my earliest start. We moved to Sydney around the same time and I lost contact with him sometime in the nineteen nineties. Once back at the bridge I flicked through the pages of the music mag as I sucked on a coldie and tended my fishing line. I stopped searching at a studio photo of my old mate Dennis which gave the first indication of what he might look like now. The most astounding part of the advertisement was the fact his music night was happening at the Harp Hotel every Wednesday night. It was late in the afternoon on a Wednesday when I read the ad and I had just enough spare cash to afford some drinks at the Bar. Thoughts of zombying out to my portable telly were abandoned as I whipped on my cleanest duds and splashed on as much aftershave as I could. Once satisfied I looked and smelled presentable in a pub situation I hooked Husky up the bike and off we went to the local. I found Dennis sitting in the beer garden of the pub among a large group of friends. It was loving hugs for he and I then I was introduced to those gathered for the music night. As I waited around for my turn to perform I sat smoking in a half opened fire door separating the gig from the beer garden. A muscular Irish security guy walked over and said "Is that a joint?" and grabbed it out of my hand. Thinking I was busted I gave him an innocent shrug as he stuck the joint in his gob. What a great pub. Just like the ones we knew in the old days. Dennis and I did a nostalgic medley of old favourites and after our set we were bombarded with compliments. I spent a lot more than I could afford on their expensive Harp stout but it was well worth it to re-connect with a buddy from so long ago.

In the months that followed our first meeting Dean was to become an increasing part of my Sydney and Botany bay experience. Whenever I was planning to move to a new location on the river he was there with his camera catching every detail. An added bonus to our connection was the fact he drove a utility and he was more than happy to help me get supplies in. From under the bridge I moved to a mangrove lined inlet that was home to a boat club with yachts moored out the front. It was a picturesque setting much like places I had stayed at in Port Stephens and the only difference was the looming skyline of Sydney in the distance. Taking in the view of Sydney from a friendly wooden jetty, over yacht masts and mangroves was the moment I felt the true success of my mission. To be in a fishing village type of setting on the outskirts of old Sydney town was as surrealistic and exotic as I needed to feel inspired. Being on the Cooks River certainly satisfied my need to go fishing but the newly emergent need to go busking was calling me away. This is the balance I was dreaming of when I made my escape from Port Stephens. To catch a fish for breakfast then ride into town and sing happy songs for the locals. Catch another fish for supper and eat him as the sun goes down. That's my idea of heaven. As I explored the Botany Bay area I was invigorated by the thought I might be following in the oar strokes of the first fleet settlers. When invading dinghy loads passed this way they would have ventured up the inlet I was now living on and it triggered the notion that I was re-discovering Australia. My current reality took on a whole new meaning as I pondered the hardships they must have endured. Here was I a castaway through choice, enjoying the fruits of the lucky land, two hundred years after they sweat blood to create it. To compliment my list of new resolves I pledged to always be grateful for the world I inherited.



NOW THAT'S A DOG

Discarded near the dumpsters at the rear of the boat club I found a slightly bent but usable canopy frame. Once attached in position and fitted with my best tarps it provided a critical component for shelter against the weather. With the addition of the collapsible canopy to my rig I was able to occupy a greater range of locations by camping on the tideline. On a chilly and windblown autumn morning I was tied up under the airport road bridge at the mouth of the Cooks river. The noise coming from departing aircraft had kept me awake all night and I was not in the best of moods. Morning coffee was being guzzled with a passion as Dean appeared to snap me out of my pre-noon irritabilities. He took shots of my new campsite as I told him about a vacant garage I had found just a short distance away. Dean and I drove my load to the disused house where the shed was and by mid afternoon it had become the first of my winter homes. The shed was full of dusty old furniture that I had to restack to make room. There were only a couple of small leaks in the roof and the double wooden doors closed and locked securely. I was stoked to be out of the elements and distanced a little from the discomforts of the great outdoors. Within two days of my arrival at Kyeemha I was granted permission to charge my batteries at a friendly roadside store. It was run by a nice family of Lebanese people who wouldn't receive a red cent for the service.

My previous campsite under the airport bridge was to become my most common fishing spot in the time I stayed in the shed. Not that it was fruitful at all. The only thing that happened to bring some excitement was when a small family group pulled up beside me on a rock wall overlooking the airport. The father only had his line in the water a couple of minutes when it suddenly went off like there was a ray on the other end. I put my handline down and scrambled to the assistance of a fellow angler who hooted and hollered as the kids went wild. It was a dirty great Kingfish and his flimsy six pound line was moving dangerously close to protruding oysters. The fish made a couple of good runs as our once a year angler hauled it in to the bucket I placed in the water. With it's large flicking tail gripped firmly in my fist I presented the bloke with his catch and we laughed with the kids as they poked at the monster Kingy.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN



HOBBO A GO GO!

The idea of myself being a homeless bum was never one that entered my thoughts as I lived through my street life years . As far as I am concerned I have always been a water bound adventurer and a travelling entertainer. For the duration of my time on the road I have never eaten scraps out of a garbage bin or slept on a park bench, so I don't have a clue what the fuck these ill informed twits are on about. It was only when the young trouble makers started calling me things like 'Derolict' and the like that I got a glimpse of how the public at large must perceive me. In the busking shows that followed this revelation I began paying more attention to my appearance by way of clothing and grooming. My first acquisitions along this line were a well crafted gold watch that never missed a beat and a couple of gold rings that looked like they were worth a lot more than they actually were. The military surplus jacket and cargo pants that are my normal mode of attire were replaced by loose fitting casual shirts under a genuine Harley Davison black leather vest. Black stretch jeans and calf high cowboy boots were added to the mix and the final addition to my new look was a genuine Stetson hat. with the change came a noticeable increase in feminine attention and the days takings started going up as well. Along with this invitations were forthcoming to parties and the like by the Cooks river crew.



gg63504886 GoGraph.com

THE KARMIC RETURN FACTOR

Once settled in the shed I started doing shows in Newtown which could be reached after long but reasonably flat bike runs through the metropolis. By traversing a network of public bike tracks out of the Botany Bay area Husky and I were able to follow the Princes highway towards the city. Staying only to the footpaths we hauled the busking trailer into King street and I set up in front of the railway station. The contrast between Katoomba, Manly and Newtown is graphic to say the least. Now I was performing in the hard core hub of inner city Sydney thus completing the cycle back to where I first started busking. It's like I kicked back into a familiar, more streetwise mode of delivery and my confidence grew with each ditty I sang. After all the songs were composed in this very type of environment and people were letting me know they empathised with the words. My daily takings at the shows were much better than at Manly but nowhere near the cash I raked in at Katoomba. Everybody loved Husky as much in Newtown as anywhere else but he wasn't showered with dog food like he was in the mountains. The commencement of the shows offered Dean another dimension to his chosen subject matter and he was quick to capture all of the new images it brought. The water Gypsy come street performer aspects of my lifestyle were now clearly documented and we saw it as a cause for celebration. Over beers and joints after busking shows and photograph sessions we laughed like men do when they are happy to be alive. With Dean and I it was more than just an artistically inspired photographer meets a silly old fart living out on the river. We knew instinctively that we had a similar view of the world and our conversations confirmed it. Regardless of my takings I lapped up the bohemian, uni campus atmosphere that King street offers to all who frequent it's streets. There are reminders at every turn of earlier times when I was an urban commando hot on the scent of fun and excitement. The younger generation of party animals who passed my way displayed approval and exaggerated the throwing of coins. Some waiting train passengers leaned on walls or light posts and tapped their feet as they digested the meanings to my words. Encouraging comments were often given like "You're good buddy" and "Why aren't you in the clubs?" which always served to validate my function in the world.



BUSKING IN NEWTOWN WITH HUSKY BOY

The bike trailer runs that Husky and I had to do to get in and out of Newtown started to take their toll. He was getting noticeably weaker with each run which rendered the whole thing unsustainable. I had to re-think my geographic reality and find a campsite closer to the place I performed. Dean was of great assistance in helping me to continue with the shows. If he was in the city for the day he would pick Hus and I up with the equipment and drop us off in Newtown. After the show we were dropped off back at home and it will be remembered as the most low energy expenditure way of doing a gig I have ever found. While I was working the street in Newtown I linked up with a fellow busker from Nimbin called Greg. He was off the smack but drinking heavily and his age had really started to show. Greg and I performed a couple of nostalgic singalongs but it was a half hearted effort on both sides. The years had somehow stolen the earlier magic and we probably looked like a couple of bums who were trying to solicit the next drink.

One morning in early winter my morning coffee was interrupted by the thing I had been most dreading. A work crew arrived at the house and they were preparing it for sale. The property was suddenly alive with lawn mowers and whipper snippers and furniture was being hauled out of the soon to be sold, deceased estate. The owner of the place was an amiable young bloke who said I could stay in the shed for a couple days until I found somewhere else to go. It just so happened that Dean and I had arranged to meet so when he arrived I filled him in what was happening. I told him about the two days grace I had been given but said I was ready to move right away if he felt like giving me a hand. This he was more than happy to do so we loaded up his ute with the tinny on top and set off for the Georges River. When Dean and I arrived at Kogarah Bay on the Georges River no suitable campsites could be found anywhere close to the water. The whole recreation area was too exposed and I really started wondering where I was going to lay my head. We were driving out of the area to look for another spot when Dean spotted a run down, two story building just across from the park. It was fenced off with sections of security fencing that we easily walked through to check out the house. Many of the rooms in the old beachouse were vandalized but there was one that looked fit for habitation. It was the only other room beside a kitchen that came off a large central dining area. I could tell it had been a study in former days because the wooden book shelves that filled a wall were relatively undamaged. Dean and I unloaded the ute in record time to avoid the scrutiny of neighbours and within the hour we were having a cold one and laughing. Looking out over Kogarah Bay through dirty, broken windows I joked with Dean how the house was more luxury than any river gypsy deserves. He was busy gathering images of my exciting new surrounds. The beach house was on Ramsgate road and my nearest shopping location was a Coles supermarket at the end of it near Botany Bay. The trip to and from the shop was a flat enough a run that it didn't tax Hus or myself too much even if we did it a couple of times a day. On my first shopping excursion with Husky I discovered a pocket of the urban landscape that stood out as far more interesting than anything else I could see.

In the front yard of a ramshackle, roadside cottage there was a vintage fire truck called Lady Penelope which was adorned with hippy'esque murals and philosophy strewn banners. On closer inspection I found the whole property looked like it had been demoleculized from the backwoods of Nimbin and reconstituted in suburban Sydney. Feeling I might know the occupant from the Northern Rivers I was unable to resist the urge to knock gently on the front door. I was greeted through a fly screen door by a guy of about my own age who wasn't at all familiar so I introduced myself. I was to learn that his name was Stanly. He invited me into his home and we got to know each other over joints and coffee. Stanley was an ex foot copper during the eighties around Kings Cross and he packed it in to become a professional surfer. We worked out amid our friendly chatter that when I was busking late in the night around the cross Stanly would have been walking the beat in those far off and dangerous times. In throwing away his life as a clean living young police officer Stanley became a creative eccentric who delights in displaying messages of hope for the passing public. In other words an exhibitionist like me and someone it was easy to be around. After hearing of my boating and squatting adventures Stanly took me for a tour of the outside laundry and shower area saying I could use them any time I Liked. It was a diplomatic way of telling me I was on the nose but it was quickly forgotten as he showed me where I could hook up my battery charger. Stanly was to become the only other person beside Dean with whom I got to experience any kind of social life. Whenever I popped in to replace batteries or take a shower friendly, light hearted conversations always transpired between us. My windswept beachouse was a cold place to during the winter months when yachts were rocking and the swells were white capping on Kogarah Bay. With no form of heating my only defence against the winter chills was to tent off the living area I had established in the study. I spent most of my time working on the laptop and I only ever ventured outside for batteries or supplies. In that time I got heaps of work done on the computer and when I needed to rest my brain I took Husky for a walk in the waterfront parklands just across the road. One time while looking for washed up tennis balls with Hus I found an ornamental plastic owl among the assorted tide line debris. For some reason the old saying "Use your time wisely" popped into my head so I took the owl home and perched it close to the laptop. When Dean and I did the move from the shed to Kogarah Bay the tinny was left chained up near the boat ramp amid plans to go fishing. I was able keep an eye out for any thieves who might come sniffing around from the upper level windows of the house so I wasn't worried about leaving it there. Early one morning as I was walking Hus I checked the boat over for any signs of disturbance and found the Kogarah city council had left a large orange sticker attached to the upturned hull. It was an official warning notice saying that I had to remove the vessel forthwith or risk having it impounded. Hardly awake yet I had to spring into action and get the boat out of the ramp area as a council truck might roll up any second to cart it away. From the ramp to the house it was about a hundred meters and my only real option was to drag the tinny across the grass on the sports field. I remember thinking it was a bloody good job I had undergone the hernia operation as I wrestled the boat over a low fence separating the park from the bitumen road near the house. After the exhausting ordeal of rescuing the tinny it was chained up in the front yard of the beach house and forgotten until the spring.

Relative to my location the only two places I might be able to go busking were the Ramsgate shops down by the beach or the Kogarah town center a much greater distance away. My first attempt to earn money at the Ramsgate Plaza proved fruitless when a butcher approached me while I was setting up. He said the shop owners didn't want any 'busking noise' in the centre and he went on to say that it would be reported. A move to the entrance of the nearby Coles supermarket proved equally disappointing when I made the stupid mistake of speaking to the staff. A stern and most inhospitable checkout attendant informed me that busking was not permitted near the supermarket entrance due to rules layed down by the administrators. My only remaining option was to negotiate the hilly climb to the Kogarah town center in the hope I might find a suitable spot. I was down to my last few bucks and I needed to earn money as pension day was still more than a week away. On our arrival in Kogarah with the busking trailer I set up in a brightly graffitied railway tunnel some distance from the main shops. I had seen security guards patrolling the shopping center entrance on earlier trips and I was not interested in attracting their attention.



The tunnel where I chose to perform was a busy link between small shops and businesses on either side of the railway tracks. The entrance to the tunnel was well sheltered from the biting July winds and it was often sunny for most of the day. Husky and I created no obstruction to the passers by and we were in clear view of those walking along the main street. It was a perfect busking spot. The multi ethnic residents of Kogarah proved both friendly and generous with the first days takings counting in at eighty five bucks. From there my earnings increased with each show and it was not unusual to receive notes ranging from fives to twenty's. No council rangers bothered me throughout my Kogarah shows and passing patrols of pushbike cops often gave smiles of approval. On one occasion as I was performing I was interrupted by an attractive, middle aged female who spoke limited English as she asked if I could help her make a phone call. Her name was Susan and on further discussion I was to find that she needed me to call up a finance company pretending to be her husband. Apparently she wanted to re-negotiate the terms of their agreement and the husband had to authorize it.

I put on my best Eastern block accent as I spoke to the phone attendant and arranged to have the appropriate forms sent to her family home. It must have been a worthwhile phone call because she slipped me a fifty buck note before saying thank you and vanishing up the street. With talk of the US credit crunch and economic down turn Susan was the first tangible evidence I had seen that things were in decline. A street performer depending on handouts from the general public should be among the first to feel the pinch but up to that point it had been barely noticeable. I was averaging eighty to a hundred bucks with each show and the shoppers continued to leave the market loaded up with stuff. The fact that Susan employed the aid of a complete stranger to ease the pressure of her weekly debts was testimony that hard times had started to impact on the suburban family home. This revelation was to give my busking repertoire a greater significance as I sang my song 'The Big Squeeze', a folksy lament for a world in the grip of greed. Another song I do concerning matters economic is a people power anthem called 'The Mess-Age' which hails the fall of the all powerful Money God and exposes him as a false messiah.

The Mess - Age

You stand before the Money God and for mercy you pray.
The chips are down on the trading floor at the end of the day.
You lost it all to the Money game now your dream won't come true.
I don't believe in the Money God and I've got a message here for you.

That's right!

This is it, this is the Mess-age you've got to read ... between the lines.
This is it, this is the Mess-age, you can't believe a word he says
he's lying all the time.

The Money God makes a promise that he knows he cannot keep.
Now the debt to the global system, is getting far too steep.
The cost to the world of nature is too far beyond our means.
I don't believe in the Money God cause he ain't quite what he seems,

That's right!

This is it, this is the Mess-age you've got to read ... between the lines.
This is it, this is the Mess-age, you can't believe a word he says
he's lying all the time.

All alone, in the line of fire, we caught you out to be a liar.
To be a fake, a false Messiah, but now your time, your time has come.

We might just make some history by cleaning up our mess.
If you want to be slave to the Money God, well you can be my guest.
Become a part of the global movement, if you long for world improvement.
You can help us to clean this mess that we have made.
It's just a stage of evolution so be part of the revolution.
Stand up! for your rights to have a say.

If you believe you've got no power and with every passing hour
the situation becomes a little more, out of hand.
Then like tidal wave of terror, expose the fundamental error
in our behavior upon this timeless ... sacred land ... Lord!

This is it, this is the Mess-age, you've got to think between the lines.
This is it, this is the Mess-age, you've got to think between the lines.
This is it, this is the Mess-age, you've got to THINK! between the lines.
This is it, this is the Mess-age, you've got to think ...'Big!'.

All alone, in the line of fire, we caught you out to be a liar.
To be a fake, a false Messiah, but now your time, your time has come.

All alone, in the line of fire, we caught you out to be a liar.
To be a fake, a false Messiah, but now your time, your time has come.

Musical contribution courtesy of Peter Head and Doug Williams.

It would seem that looming economic recession and environmental concerns have elevated my role to social commentator and street level promoter of global solutions. My eco-anthems like 'Once Upon A Planet' and Reason or Rhyme are perfectly suited to the new push for sustainability and people are exposed to my philosophy through complimentary CD's they receive for contributions over ten bucks. The CDs cost me two dollars a pop to produce for discs and photo copied sleeves. The compliments I receive after the albums have been heard are the most satisfying reward I can imagine and doing the shows is how I intend to get my kicks before the whole shithouse goes up in flames. The Kogaraha shows came to an abrupt end when a young, Lebanese hair stylist from across the road called up the local council. Two blokes who weren't even Rangers approached me and said that I had to move on. The only proof they were council officials was the Garden Attendant insignias on their shirts and I didn't intend to leave without a fight. I used every trick in the book but the worker drones were insistent and threats to bring in the police were made. The Snooty nosed fudge packer from the hair salon gave a self satisfied smile as Husky and I left the tunnel and the worker drones departed. I imagine they had to attend to bin emptying duties and the picking up of discarded condoms in smelly toilet blocks.

The coldest part of winter had well and truly taken hold as the Kogaraha shows concluded and I was not inspired to be hanging around on any dismal, wind blown streets. The sudden loss of income meant I had to get by on my pension payments alone so all luxuries were suspended, except for pot and booze. Dean dropped Hus and I off in Newtown for a couple of weekend shows during that period but it was more for our own enjoyment than any serious kind of returns. Busking is most definitely a summer sport. The whole experience changes when the bright, warm days of the summer are replaced by the cold, wet, and miserable months in between. I've worked out that a buskers days takings are largely determined by weather conditions at the time and how the traversing public mass respond to it. It might be clear and blue one moment then overcast and threatening the next. The coins will be landing in the case at a steady rate and then suddenly stop because people start thinking about getting their clothes off the line. To secure the squat against the vandalising neighbourhood kids I had to do makeshift repairs to large sections of security fencing that had been erected all around the property.

I used old doors to fill gaps between the sections so the kids couldn't climb through and once that was done I laid trip lines all over the place. If anyone entered the property from any point a disturbed fishing line would cause beer bottles to fall upstairs and give me warning of an invasion. The trip line strategy worked well and the kids soon learned that the house was off limits. I wasn't so concerned about the youngsters who wanted to smash the place up it was the roaming gangs of drunk teenagers on the weekends who most occupied my thoughts. I knew that some of them had been in the place prior to my arrival because of the signature scribing on all of the walls. The glass in the windows of the study had not been broken and through them I could see the street entrance to my home. Two movable sections of security fencing served as my front gate and I kept them chained and padlocked at all times. It was late after closing time on a blustering August night when I was woken by the sound of nearby voices and drunken hollering in the distance. Still groggy I staggered to the window of the study and looked out to see streetlight silhouetted teenagers climbing over the front gate. There must have been twenty of them in the group with giggling females in tow.



IN THE RAMSGATE BEACH SQUAT COOKING UP A FEED

I allowed Hus to continue barking and raced upstairs to a glassless window directly overlooking the gate. In the most unthreatening voice possible I poked my head out the window and asked the invading gang if I could help them with anything. The intoxicated reply that came from an obvious ring leader was "Hey everyone there's a hobo living here, ... Let's get him" and that's the moment I opted for retreat. I barricaded Husky and myself into the study with him still barking his head off and I pushed a heavy lounge chair against the door. In my estimations five or so of the gang had busted through the front door and they were smashing everything in sight. Their drunken friends could be heard laughing downstairs and fireworks were being exploded to add to my terrors.

With a cocked speargun in one hand and my mobile phone in the other I made contact with emergency services as the large plate glass windows in the main room were shattered. Objects were thrown at the study door among the mayhem but none of the louts made any attempt to get in. It's a good job as I might have ended up on a manslaughter charge for putting a spear in some drunk teenagers throat. Satisfied they had smashed everything worth destroying the gang departed back to the street and fled across the park when a patrol car arrived. The cops didn't come to the front gate as I had requested and after a half hearted cruise of the area they drove off into the night. The moment I was sure my surrounds were free of marauding barbarians I left the house and went up the road to Stanleys place. Husky and I sat out the hours till dawn in Lady Penelope and in the morning I cleared the beach house of my stuff. On reflection I have concluded that this my second encounter with hostile streetkids was a karmic backlash because they were all just like me at the same age. Mind you the neighbourhood I came from was much tougher than the one these young rebels come from and some old hobo might not have escaped with his life. I used to throw empty beer bottles out of opened car windows as silly girls squeaked in the back seat and my rowdy, tanked up buddies roared out encouragement. Now when I encounter a broken beer bottle in my bike travels I accept it as my well deserved karma and I have a private chuckle as I remember my days of adolescent fun and delinquency.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**'The smArt old fArt stArted the eARTh heArt chArter, then with a cut from the
surgeans scalpel, all of his badly diseased Arteries were sliced apArt.'**

So much for my earlier suggestion that I might run out of things of significant interest to mention in these chapter intro's I'm sending out to you. A couple of nights ago I found myself distracted by a growing feeling of breathlessness. I tried as long as I could to just shrug off as 'too many joints before dinner', but it kept nagging away at my thoughts until it received the full focus of my attention. It felt like it was getting worse by the minute so I made an affirmative decision to take action and wouldn't you know it. Both of my android phones decided to go pear shaped on me as I was attempting to dial the emergency number. This left Bazza next door as my most available option to call out for help. Once it was confirmed that the medics were on their way I struggled to pack my laptop and other essentials into the computer bag, gasping for air through my mouth and I became quite panicked in the process. My first thoughts were 'I've got the virus' but it seemed unusual that other than a lack of breath and intermittent head spins there were no real flue like symptoms to speak of.

Amid the blue and red flashing illumination on my mercy dash to the hospital I was hooked up to an oxygen mask and thereafter bombarded with a medical history questionnaire by the male and female on board crew. After an initial examination my first night was spent in the emergency observation ward, from which I was to have my first cardiac procedure. It was soon established that I had sustained an artery blockage and at present I am informed that I am in need of a triple bypass operation if it's safe to do so. My previous research into the symptoms of heart attack revealed that it feels like there's an elephant sitting on your chest. I suppose I should be grateful that my cardiac event as they call it was no way near that dramatic. The word from the doctors is that after the bypass procedure I will have significantly reduced the risk of any further heart related problems. **A FEW MINUTES LATER.** Oh! But how fast things can change my dears. I thought I had put the final full stop on this section and then in walks my team of cardiologists doing their morning rounds. There was me thinking I'd had a relatively minor coronary event and it seems the exact opposite is true. In light of our little chat today I am now feeling extremely lucky to have survived the ordeal at all. The word from the top is the bypass surgery will only go ahead if they can tick all the boxes on my overall health. If not they will continue how they started by clamping open my blocked arteries with little metal thingamajigs as they were described to me. Jesus! What's next?

'The beat goes on!, ... Yeah! The beat goes on!'

ON THE MOVE AGAIN

My time in the granny flat came to an abrupt end when an employee of the property owner wandered into the place. He was a hostile motherfucker with a black eye who pulled a side door open and started ordering me out. I went along with his instructions and began packing my gear as he raved on about the blokes from the boarding house next door dumping their rubbish in the back yard. My uninvited guest exposed himself as a proper fuckwit when he threatened to call in an army of fifteen bikies who would deal with the arseholes next door. The moment the groundsman grew tired of talking to himself he departed and I immediately alerted my neighbours of the threat. We all had a good chuckle as they sucked on beers and described the magnitude of the Ramsgate Social Club army who would sort out the bikies. It's little wonder the guy had a black eye if he runs around the place acting like the High Commander of the Hells Angels.

Dean responded to my phone call within the hour and by sundown I had my camp set up in the canopied dinghy. I launched the boat under grey, rain bloated clouds and tied up beside the ramp directly in front of the Cooks River Boat Club. My plan was to spend the first night at the ramp then head off up the river to a spot Brad had showed me in a borrowed inflatable. If I could establish a well concealed campsite close to the boatyard I would have access to grid electricity and showers which would validate trips to Ramsgate by taxi. I might also be able to do shows at the Wolli Creek railway station just across the highway and who knows where it could lead to from there. I saw the move as an opportunity to test my skills in unfamiliar territory and it was later to prove an unwise choice. The first of my troubles started when the sinking tide retreated in the night well outside my expectations. I thought I had accurately judged where the boat would settle but it came to rest on a rock I hadn't seen at a horrible, unsleepable angle. In persistent drizzle and knee deep in mud I managed to correct the angle of the boat but any thought of knocking out some zeds was gone. At first light I discovered an open cool room and storage area beneath a vacant shop not far from the boatyard so the bulk of my load was hastily stored inside it. My most immediate boating equipment and camping gear was left tarped over at the top of the ramp on a grassy area just beside the footpath. The boat has taken in far too much water during the night and a few age old leak sites had to be repaired before I was going anywhere.

As I was pulling the tinny up the ramp I looked over to see someone's arse in the air looking under my tarp. I asked in a concerned tone what he was doing and the old bloke fired up immediately. It was the manager of the boat club who I was yet to meet and he made this point known as he asked what I was doing. I told him I was a mate of Brads and I was waiting for a boat trailer to arrive then I went off to take a shower and find some hot coffee. Husky was bouncing around with the resident boatyard pup as I had a shower and stole a few moments to eat breakfast.

In the hour or so it took to do these things my belongings at the ramp were removed by a council dump truck, never to be seen again. A couple of blokes I questioned saw the truck arrive less than ten minutes earlier and they witnessed it's operators throwing my stuff in the crusher. The only things left sitting on the ramp were the tinny and it's canopy everything else was gone. I was struck by a sudden wave of relief when I

pondered how close I had come to taking the laptop. I changed my mind at the very last minute thinking it might get wet and that I suppose was its saving grace. My portable TV and radio were taken along with my bedroll, the oars and anchor and a portable butane cooker. The motherfuckers also got my spear gun which was my main defence against any squat intruders or other trouble makers I encounter. According to Brad the Manager of the Boatclub would have made a call to the council and requested they remove the stuff. Without proof a confrontation would have been futile so I just had to bite my tongue and get on with it. If it wasn't mischief on the old blokes part then what sort of moronic, council attendants are these who can't distinguish illegally dumped rubbish from some boating enthusiasts private property waiting to be launched. The last of my good canvas tarps were used to create a new bedroll set up with a length of foam I found in the boatyard. Until I was able to acquire new pillows and blankets I got by with a tarp for cover and the cushion off my easy chair was used to rest my head on. Heavy rains came down on our first and only night sleeping in the cool room area and Husky was really agitated by all the passing boatclub drunks. He barked violently at them on numerous occasions and I found it impossible to get any sleep. With no portable TV or radio to zombie out on I just had to sit it out till morning, deep in thought and totally revising my plans. The whole move back to the Cooks River now seemed completely unsustainable, having lost so much to a council sanctioned, act of theft. I was totally disinterested in the idea of replacing things like oars and anchors so an act of intoxicated spontaneity saw me donating the tinny to Brad and his cronies before I abandoned the area.

My attempt to seek new horizons had proved a dismal failure so, for the first time in my travels I decided to double back on my own tracks. In light of what I had experienced it seemed the odds were stacked against me, so a return to Ramsgate Beach stood out as my best available option. With the decision a new brand of common sense kicked in and I realised how stupid it was to go prospecting for new busking spots when I was already sitting on a goldmine. What was I possibly thinking? How could I even contemplate abandoning a location that netted me a hundred and seventy bucks for an easy going, new years eve show? Besides with talk of a looming global depression at every turn it would be foolish to let go of a proven source of income. Age and physical fitness play critical roles in the decisions we make and they are the main reason I left the tinny with the lads at the boatyard. It was just too much hard work carting it around the place. With the boat and so many of my other belongings gone I resolved to go the whole hog and completely lighten my load. A new baggage transport system based on the principal 'If it's not on wheels it can't come' went into action and my burden was greatly lessened. A couple of wheeled suitcases and a normal backpack were the only things I intended to travel with other than my bedroll, the pushbike and the busking trolley. A second sack trolley was included as a late addition as it could also be used as a multi purpose bike trailer. After years of faithful service my two big flight cases were discarded into an empty cool room along with anything else that wasn't absolutely critical to my needs. At the end of my frantic load reduction an easily manageable assortment of baggage was left standing beside a traffic light in readiness for the next move.

Dean was off in South Australia documenting the drought effected Murray Darling basin so I was forced to act by independent means to depart the Cooks River. After a time the very thing I was keeping an eye out for pulled up at the traffic lights in the form of an empty ute wit two knockabout looking blokes in the front. I ran over to the car and poked my head in the window saying to the driver "Hey! Do you want to earn a quick fifty bucks?". He jumped at the opportunity and minutes later I was sitting between the two of them driving my load back to Ramsgate Beach with Husky tied up in the back. On our arrival in the area I instructed the driver to pull up in a disused caryard on Rocky Point Road. We unloaded the gear in a shady corner of the lot then I fixed him up with the fifty I had promised. The guy said he was happy to receive the money as he had just been laid off work and I said I was glad he was there when I needed him. They drove off up the highway leaving me to savour the moment of my second tangible encounter with people who are trying to survive in times of economic recline. I really hope that fifty buck note put food on the table for some hungry kids and made their dads lot a little easier. Poor bastard, he jumped at the chance to earn a little extra cash and in doing so my new transportation system was hailed a great success.

The large showrooms of the car lot were virtual scribe and graffiti art galleries which were great to look at but felt much to dangerous to camp in. I chose the caryard as a dropoff point because it was the first place I could think of where I might be able to stash some gear. My next intention after that was to scout the neighbourhood in search of a place to camp which was reasonably close to my busking spot. To my absolute delight I found I didn't have to look any further than across the street, because there were two empty houses sitting side by side just waiting for someone to move in. One of the houses had been the target of young arsonists but the other hadn't even been spray canned yet. I wheeled my load to the house in five easy moves and left them in a kitchen area then I went off to explore the layout of the five roomed residence I had landed in. Apart from a big back yard for Husky the other big plus I found was a high, lockable gate to keep the streetkids out. When I checked out the power box there was no free electricity to be had but the house had no leaky ceilings and all of the taps were working. I found an active power point in the fire door of a carpet manufacturer just up the road which satisfied my domestic needs and left enough charge for the shows. My newly acquired home represented a successful return to the area and it served as the base camp from which I re-established my position in the community. I did a victory performance on the second day after my arrival making an easy ninety bucks and it felt like I had made the right choice by coming back. Glowing embers of resentment and anger still smouldered inside me every time I thought about the theft of my gear by drone council workers. Brighter by far were the rising flames of self determination that drove me forward in absolute spite of any loss I may have suffered. I made the fast acquisition of funds my foremost priority and this was to be closely followed by a spending spree to replace the items that were lost. My weekend gigs in Ramsgate proved as profitable as ever so it was off to the electric store in search of the best there is on offer. A 'so called' portable, mini digital TV worth three hundred dollars went straight back in the box after I read a pamphlet hidden deep inside the packet saying it had to be connected to a conventional, roof

mounted ariel. That's not portable you fuckwit. The guy at the local pawn shop came to my rescue with a hand held, analogue receiver for only ninety bucks. My new battery powered radio was picked up for a mere twenty dollars at an Asian discount outlet and a DVD player from K Mart made my home entertainment package complete. A brand spanking new, all weather bedroll was acquired at the local bushmans outfitters on which I could relax and enjoy my new toys as I thumbed my nose at the world. Arseholes.

The complimentary CD's I was handing out for donations over five dollars were going like hotcakes so I had to devise an on the road manufacturing plant to deal with rising demand. In a spare room of the house I gradually established a system of CD production so efficient and smooth running it made me chuckle with private delight every time I had to churn out a new batch. While a CD was being burned in the laptop I would be cutting out it's photo copied cover with scissors and then glue sticking it onto a cheap paper sleeve. In no time flat new piles of 'Busking Years' and 'Once upon a Planet' albums were ready for distribution and the whole exercise would have cost me less than fifty bucks. My reasoning is if people have retained your recorded music in their homes it's far more likely they will throw a coin when next they see you on the street. It's as if you have been welcomed into their hearts through a simply ungreedy gesture and they relate you like a friend whenever they pass your way. Other than my busking performances the low budget, home crafted albums I hand out might be the only artistic legacy I get to leave in the world. Perhaps 'The Age of Environmental Sanity' will dawn long after I am dead and my songs will be embraced as anthems by a new generation. Now that would really be something and it would make the life I have lived that much more worthwhile. Fuck. Now I'm hoping there really is a heaven so I won't miss out on all the fun. Max. One of the young surfers I mentioned has started showing increased interest in the music on my MP3 backing tracks. I find his interest as exciting as it is daunting you see he's twenty three and so downright bloody gorgeous he might just have what it takes to be a star. If his singing ability and guitar skills are up to scratch a serious re-working of my material could send him straight to the top of the charts. A few mornings ago I found myself committing to a meeting with max at his place in Bondi to see what we could come out with. I only hope it's not a waste of time. Potentially it puts me in a compromising position because if he sounds horrible I have to be honest and if he's the next big thing I have to completely re-evaluate my plans. At the very least I would be required at a studio level and that would mean a permanent home or it ain't gonna happen. If Max is as talented as he is good looking he might just be the youth ambassador I've been dreaming of for years. Without wanting to sound too vain, I'm positive the lyric content of my best material is potent enough to make him the thinking mans choice in pop stars. Even if he only chose to work with my love songs and musical tales from the street Max will be a smash hit with the ladies and he might get us both filthy rich in the process.

The house I occupied on Rocky Point Road was part of an industrial complex scheduled for demolition. On a sunny February morning I spied some official looking bloke walking in the front yard so I went out to greet him. He said he was the demolition contractor and the place was coming down in less than a week. The bloke kindly allowed me some

time to move out and it was a most civil affair compared to my last eviction. After more than two months of free accommodation the time had now arrived to road test my squat to squat road transport system. The spot I had targeted as an interim campsite was a yard at the side entrance to a disused doctors surgery. The doors and windows were all securely locked with bars in front but the garden was an ideal place to pitch a tent. Perfect summer, camping conditions were under way in a cool spell between heatwaves as I commenced to tow my load. Hus and I pulled the busking trolley up Rocky Point Road with my heavy bed roll strapped across the Amplifiers. The sack truck was used in the second load to carry the wheeled suitcases containing my kitchen gear and studio electrics. A third load saw a big tarp roll and an overfull clothes backpack safely in their new home. The fourth and final trip was for things like water buckets and the like. That day Hus did four fully loaded trips each of about two hundred meters and he was still wanting to play ball as I was setting up a shelter.

'Friggin Superdog'

Extending from a fence towards the side entrance of the surgery there was a brick wall separating two garden sections. One section was populated by palms but lucky for me the other was free of plants and flat enough to create a tarped over floor. I extended my largest, dual surface tarpaulin from the top of the wall to a bordering fence and it made an ideal lean to complete with a zip up shade cloth entrance. I still went through countless cans of fly spray dealing with bushflies but it was wonderful to be living out under the stars again. The spot I had been charging my batteries at was even closer now which made battery runs much less of a burden. In the sunny new setting I decided the time for experimentations with undersized solar panel was over so I invested in two new units I was assured would do the job. Thereafter each day was spent religiously focussed on the panels and they were constantly re-positioned to received maximum sunlight. I found running two panels each of twenty watts was barely enough to charge a large battery to full voltage capacity. On the hotter days I was able to run a small fan for a few hours and the TV for a while in the evenings, but just as the weather report was about to come on the power inverter would start to scream it's head off. In the end I concluded that a house roof, fully solar panelled might do the trick but for me it had to be a hobby based backup system for the times I was unable to access grid power. Two days after our occupation Husky let out the first warning bark I had heard since we arrived at the surgery. On cautious investigation I found a cleaning lady with a mop just inside the opened side door. We spoke briefly and she said the Doctor was aware of my presence in the yard but he had not instructed her to turf me out. She seemed like a nice enough person and we went on to chat about Husky's playful nature. Before returning to her cleaning duties the lady requested that I put the bins out on garbage night to which I agreed shaking my head in disbelief.

Could it be that some kind, faceless Doctor has taken pity on a homeless traveller and allowed him to remain through Christian or other charitable beliefs? Have I finally arrived at the place of my dreams. A patch of ground to camp on, close to the source of my income and unhindered by lingering thoughts of eviction. I relaxed into my new

environment like a battle weary soldier who has made it to safe territory. Another victory performance was in order to celebrate my continued stay in Ramsgate and the fact I was making all the right decisions. With our move to the surgery the distance from my camp to the shops was shortened but on hot days it was still a slog to get back up the hill. I found the best strategy was to push Hus to the limit up the initial, tree shaded slopes and then walk bike and trailer the remaining distance to the main road. In this way my leg and lower back were not unnecessarily over work and I could get dinner ready in the evening relatively free of pain. The consistent flow of income I received from the shows guaranteed a bottle of hard liquor to nightcap the events of the day and as the last was emptied it was replaced in a mood of carefree abandon. The el' cheapo brands at the bottle barn were overlooked and in their place only the best was acquired. My consumption of beer was reduced from longnecks of Joe Punter special brew to smaller bottles of imported ale like I used to drink in the nightclub days. The shift from less beer to more spirits showed a noticeable reduction in body weight to the point I could again fit in my favourite black jeans. With only four upper, front teeth to go in my weekly extraction programme the chewing of cooked vegetables had become impossible so rich and nutritious, bloody Mary's became part of my bar set up to remedy the problem. There's a high population of alcoholics in the Botany Bay area and I see them lined up waiting for the bottl'o to open in the mornings when I do my shows. I'm sure alcoholism is a genetic problem because I drink like a parched sponge but I have never strayed from my only with dinner principal. The thought of tugging on a cold one at first light makes me dry reach and I thank my lucky stars I am not in the same boat as those guys.

We got to camp in the back yard of the surgery for about three weeks then an unexpected visit by the law brought things to a close. Apparently the Doctor was not the unseen sponsor I had imagined and I was given official notice it was time to move on. My shelter was quickly dismantled after the cops left and packed tightly onto the sack trolley. I packed the last of my stuff in the blistering midday sun then Hus and I were ready for the next leg of my squat hopping routine to a row of abandoned buildings a little further up Rocky Point Road. The houses had long since become the ransacked meeting place of the local kids but there were a couple of empty sheds near the back lane that might have escaped their attention. Within a couple of hours I was set up behind a secured roller door with the main house in full view and I intended to watch for any teen activity through the night before I thought about moving in. Not long after sundown I heard delinquent laughter about three houses up and the next day I confirmed it was their most common hangout. There were cushions arranged for seating around a brightly graffitied room and recently used bongos were sitting between them on the floor. The place seemed far enough away not to be a problem and the only thing I would really have to do was keep my movements in the laneway undetected. It only took the local mischief makers a couple of days before they realised I had moved into the house belonging to the shed.

I returned from a busking show to find they had attempted to kick in the back door which was barricaded with a heavy stove and some timber. It would had to have been teenagers of reasonable strength because the stove had been moved just short of the distance it would take for intruders to climb in. A series of brick throwing incidents in

the nights that followed saw me brandishing a fishing knife out in the laneway and threatening to cut off their balls. The three young louts retreated into the night but I didn't feel like hanging around to see how big their army was. I pulled up camp on the spot and it was hastily transported to a sheltered location in view of the row of houses. I watched intently as a light drizzle sprinkled the scene and sure enough they returned in even greater numbers. I saw about nine of them walk off Rocky Point Road into the front yard of the house and a short while later the windows began to smash. When the demolition party was over they left the area laughing and joking like they had done something worthwhile. I wonder if the day will ever come when those teenage larrikins find themselves homeless old men in terror of being assaulted or killed by hoards of Hell bent youngsters. The rains passed with the night and as the dawn was approaching Husky and I set off down the hill in search of a new base. Things had moved fast since I got the boot from the surgery and I hadn't yet located a backup camp. I needed to be closer the shops in a place the kids hadn't yet targeted with a yard for Husky to bounce around in. My new camping site came in the form of an empty house just a short ride from the beach on Russel Avenue. There was no sign of delinquent activity in the rooms even though the back door was left wide open. The power wasn't connected but it seemed well tucked away in a mostly apartment filled neighbourhood where people tend to mind their own business.

The best thing that happened in the time I was at Russel Avenue was a pre-arranged meeting with my daughter Miranda. It had been more than a decade since last I saw her face to face and it was only after I reminded her of this fact our personal contact finally came about. We had exchanged a number of friendly conversations over the phone since our initial Father and Daughter reunion but nothing can beat the feeling of actually holding someone in your arms. Our little family get together took place at the Royal Hotel in Bondi in a windy, rain battered beer garden. Now twenty four Miranda had just returned from a holiday in Brazil with friends and she had young ladies, travel tales to tell. I had taken a collection of family photographs along to leave with her for safe keeping which made her giggle and squeel when she discovered shots of herself as a toddler. As she sat before me changing facial expressions to suit the conversation I saw reflections of myself and Lizzy taking it in turns to dominate Miranda's appearance. Like I said in the first book Beth and I were a couple of good looking sorts in the prime of our youth and it reflected in Miranda every time I glanced her way. We've made a pledge that when my new choppers arrive we are going out on the town for a "Dad's got new teeth' celebration at my expense, in the swankiest joint in town.

ABOUT AS SEXY AS AN ASHTRAY

Where have all the sweet and adorable nurses gone that I was pampered by in earlier times? It seems like these days all that's on offer is plug ugly and mostly obese specimens of femininity that wouldn't even inspire a soft on. They all speak in foreign accents that are so difficult to understand that I just nod my head as I roll over and pretend I'm sleeping. I've lost track of how long I have been cooped up in this hospital room, it must be about a week and a half by now. So the latest news from on high is my general state of health is such that the surgeons don't want to risk opening up my chest for a triple bypass as they are concerned about my ability to heal properly from the operation. They say in light of my diabetes and a long history of smoking that I am better suited to an ongoing course of drugs and at some stage in the future I will be fitted with a pace maker implant. For old Mr. pothead here the most significant detail is the fact that joints and bonges and pipes and all other forms of smoking grass are now a thing of the past, if I want to remain alive. If there's any good news to be had from the doctors it's the fact that the oral consumption of medical marijuana is within the realms of acceptability, so I guess it's how I have to maintain my weed habit from here on in. I was climbing the wall for the first few days after my admission to hospital from going cold turkey on booze and smoko and everything else they deem to be bad for me, even coffee. My big plan to have Dominic smuggle in some whiskey and a small jar of weed oil was foiled when they were discovered at the security gate. No plan B there. The word is I should be discharged by the end of this week if there are no more attacks and the doctors are satisfied that the drugs are doing their job. 'Praise be!' for little mercies I suppose. So it might just be that I will get to complete my captains log and you my readers will miss out on the opportunity to witness my arrival at the use by date the fates have assigned to me.

CRACKING THE TON

During my stay at the beach house I explored the surrounding territory and located what looked like a viable backup dwelling. It was an empty, three bedroom house directly opposite the Ramsgate Plaza and just two minutes walk from the beach. At the end of the driveway beside the house there was a drive in garage with a roller door and attached to the rear of the shed a small granny flat had been constructed. I decided on the granny flat as the best place to set up camp because the walls in the house had not yet been spray canned and it looked like a magnet for teenage mischief. Besides the small flat behind the shed was sitting in the shade of tall pine trees which would be a big plus in the approaching heat of summer. Dean was right there without a moments hesitation to assist with my next move. We wrestled the dinghy into the front section of the shed and the granny flat was turned into compact but comfortable living quarters. As we were checking out the main house Dean made the fortunate

discovery that the electrical power had been left on. Excited by the find I went looking for a power point in the granny flat and bingo there it was. Now I was in business. I had landed well and truly on my feet and I saw my new home as the Holy grail of this squat hopping lifestyle. The ornamental owl took pride of place in my new, grid connected work station and the mission at hand was to complete all of my projects before the lights went out. The wise use of time strategy expanded in magnitude and became applicable not only to an electrical power flow but to my life in general. At fifty two and counting I had no idea when my own life giving energies would be suddenly cut off so the race was on to complete my projects and perhaps leave an artistic legacy in the world.

My new campsite was directly opposite the busy Ramsgate Plaza shopping centre and it felt like a challenge too attractive to ignore. My first attempt in this place had been a dismal failure but after I spied a fellow busker named Dennis playing his banjo right near the Coles entrance I decided to give it another try. The spot I set up in was directly in front of a large, outside carpark between the supermarket and a discount bottle barn. I only hoped it was far enough away from the entrance to the Coles store that my amplified performance wouldn't become an issue. The strip of pavement I occupied was busy with shopping activity and there was just enough room to put the money case out so it wasn't in the way of rushing trolley wheels. I kept the volume level on the amp to a bare minimum so as not to attract the attention of the shop proprietors and apprehensively commenced to go through my sets. The coins started landing in healthy abundance the more relaxed and comfortable I became and within an hour I had made enough to pay for dinner and a bottle of Jack. As I was kicking off for the second set I spotted trouble in the form of an overweight, young supermarket manager pushing a line of trolleys directly towards me along the pavement. As he maneuvered the awkward load past Husky and myself he stopped for a breath and took a moment to look me over. He asked over the top of the music if I had council permission then he continued on his way with the trolleys before I had a chance to answer. If he had of taken the time to look he would have seen my Sydney Council busking permit clearly displayed in the money case.

Once I had finished the song I scooped up the permit and raced over to where he was pushing the trolleys into a rack. I literally poked the permit under his nose in an irate gesture and complained about how I hate being interrupted when I am performing. The supermarket boss became all apologetic at my little outburst claiming he just needed to know that I was legally permitted to be there. My strategy worked. The permit expired some months earlier but my pre Madonna display was moving so fast the manager didn't have time to examine the date on the card. With the supermarket proprietor now satisfied that I was street legal I was free to earn my daily bread just a short walk from where I was living. My first performance netted eighty or so dollars from the locals and things just went North from there. In the weeks that followed I averaged seventy to ninety bucks a day as I familiarized with the Ramsgate population and instilled myself in the daily streetlife on the shores of Botany Bay.

The ancient guitar amp I had been using since the first Katoomba shows was looking worse for wear after our travels and it would often cut out mid song due to a faulty

internal connection. At a pawn shop up on Rocky Point Road I was able to purchase two brand new busking amps for a hundred bucks each and they had more than enough grunt to be heard over the noise of the street. I mounted both amplifiers on a sturdy sack trolley that I found just a few days earlier discarded near a charity bin. The hard rubber wheels on the trolley were replaced with larger, soft rubber wheels from a modern pram and it was to become the most streamlined and efficient bike trailer I have ever owned. Hus and I were able to haul the trolley along the bike tracks when it was fully loaded with a bedroll, my easy chair and all of the other stuff it takes to be a beach fishing, gypsy minstrel. The house right next door to the shed was an all male boarding house occupied by a varied assortment of rowdy characters. The large front veranda and garden area had become a gathering point for all the local piss pots and there was a sign hanging over the front door that read, 'The Ramsgate Resort'. I have nicknamed them 'The good old boys' in remembrance of the chorus from American pie. It was easy to befriend my new neighbours and none of them gave a rat's ass about the fact I was squatting in the run down shed next door. They loved Husky to pieces and delighted in his game playing antics on the front lawn. The lads would enquire after each show how much I had made and if I scooped more than a hundred dollars that day it was a real pleasure to inform them I had cracked the ton. Through the boarding house crew I got to meet most of the knockabout underclass who inhabit the Ramsgate area and it proved a big plus whenever I did a show. It's always good for business when you are giving familiar nods and waves to the locals passing by. Others see the gestures being exchanged and it somehow adds to their sense of local community. People will often throw coins just to feel like they are part of the tribal flow. The Ramsgate area which sits between Dolls Point and Brighton Le Sands is dominated by those of Middle Eastern appearance with a healthy multicultural mix to make up the rest of the population. Going by the cars they drive and my average daily earnings I imagine many of them are well off home owners who are undeterred by these hard economic times. I love the ones who pop out of nowhere for just a fleeting moment to slip me a ten or twenty dollar note then they drive off in expensive foreign saloons. Good looking women in stylish threads will often make a big fuss of Husky and I get to check out bulging cleavages as they bend over him in overdone displays of affection.

The hardest ones to crack for some small change are the mostly stern faced Eastern women but every now and then I get a smile. No chance of any boob shows from them. Amid the apparent affluence of the area there is still a thriving street life with all the predictable characters you would expect to find in an urban setting. As I do my shows I am often witness to the antics of a half cast aboriginal called Graham who dines out of the garbage bins and performs a weird little dance as he inter-reacts with inanimate objects. He has obvious mental problems and he will often cause havoc among the shoppers until a patrol car is called in to calm him down. Once when I was performing he came too close to Husky doing his spooky little dance routine and he copped a nasty bite on the leg. At the peak of his incoherent verbal outburst he got abusive to those gathered around, until a muscular young Lebanese guy stepped in to restrain him. The Spook as I have named him has a campsite near a mangrove lined creek some distance from the beach and there's been talk of him exposing himself to schoolkids whose playground is directly opposite the swamp. This was the reason the good old boys turfed him out when he tried to move in next door. On hearing the story I asked the lads why

they hadn't kicked me out as well and I was told I was "different breed". I felt honoured. The compliment assured me I was having exactly the kind of big city experience I had been craving when I left Port Stephens and hit the road. The longer I stayed in the Ramsgate area the stronger my sense of community belonging grew and the anonymity I had known was blown to the four winds. My busking shows clicked into their true sociological function somewhere along the way and people started using my musical setting to stop for friendly chats. The formation of a busking circle is initiated in this very way and it's always a good sign when people are relaxed. Conversations invariably turn to Husky and often I have found myself in the company of two or more seemingly available females of the appropriate age and body shape. In the final stages of tooth extraction I let countless opportunities slide but when my new choppers arrive it will be a different matter. I've made a pledge to pursue all potentially sexual encounters with full gusto provided they fit my criteria of what a good woman is.

Among the more regular identities I encountered on the street there was a stern and seemingly unapproachable young man who I learned was called Thomas. He was about thirty, lean and fighting fit with piercing eyes that can penetrate the very soul of those he is yet to trust. Thomas had heard on the street telegraph about my troubles with the spook and he made it the theme of his conversation when first we spoke. I slipped him thirty bucks on a gentleman's agreement that he would have a little chat with the offender and tell him to stay away from my shows. This was achieved forthwith and Thomas my unofficial bodyguard was to become a regular drinking partner and confidant. After a couple of hefty slugs of Jack Danials or Southern comfort from by bar he really opened up and I was to hear his life story from A to Z. Tom was a South African immigrant who had lived through the apartheid years. He settled in Australia after a marriage of convenience to a woman who later mothered his two children. It was a hostile and messy affair of which I received regular updates at our afternoon pissups. His main vocation besides hustling pot on the street was cage fighting at back lane events, an occupation that I found intriguing. I thought things like this had been outlawed a long time ago but apparently it's a thriving business in the warehouse districts of Sydney.

Thomas vanished from the Ramsgate street scene as quick as he had appeared and I haven't seen or heard of him since. I knew he had issues with the law because of his wife and he probably had to go into hiding to stay out of jail.

On a sunny afternoon in late November I was doing my stuff on the street when a battered Toyota van caught my eye. The reason it got my attention was because my old busking partner 'Mort' or 'Lord Muck all Mighty' as some might remember him was at the wheel. He parked the car and got out then he proceeded to walk towards the shop entrance without giving me a second glance. At the electric doors of the shop he stopped dead in his tracks on hearing a familiar tune. I was singing 'The Local pub Nightclub' a track in which he sang backing vocals in the final recorded version. The moment where our eyes met was cold and uncomfortable and he pointed at the electric door in a lame gesture that said he had to go shopping. This is a man who I once travelled very close to and bestowed with the title 'The brother I never had'. Now after years of separation at a once in a lifetime, chance meeting he has to go shopping.

I just happened to be on fire at the time and cleaning up which made it inconvenient to suddenly stop performing. The fucking ego maniac probably expected me to stop singing at his arrival and make a big fuss, but I've become far too professional for that. Besides he doesn't deserve the attention. I was again singing as he exited the shopping centre and apprehensively walked over to where I was set up. My abundant takings were thoroughly scrutinised as the song concluded and I turned off the amps so we could speak. I hit him with a cheerful "Hi! Morty to a lethargic response and all he wanted to do was engage in meaningless small talk about my dog as he floundered awkwardly in my presence. No mention was made of the irreplaceable videos he failed to return or any of the other unresolved issues between us. The years had stolen his once good looks leaving him a bloated and unhealthy mess which prompted me to assign him the new nickname of 'Mr. Balloon face'. After zero emotional contact or real and meaningful communications Lord shit for brains walked back to his van and drove off into the traffic. The videos Mr. Balloon face cheated me out of contained the only remaining footage of our early busking days in Paddington markets and there was a section covering a performance we did at the Glebe Point Road Street Party. I guess I'll never see them again and I hope I never see that sorry old fart for the same amount of time. I spoke to Young William about the chance meeting I had with Mort and he informed me that he has been receiving annoying phone calls from our mutual acquaintance. Apparently Mr. 'Use up your friends and then dump them' has been pestering him for some early photographs. As we spoke Will and I churned over a list of possible reasons why my once close friend was acting so distant towards me. His first suggestion was the possibility that Mort had been caught out in a lie. The lie being the fact he told Will he was staying in Palm beach with the old sailing crew but he was actually shackled up with the crack whore he had mentioned who lives in Brighton Le Sands. This is a plausible reason why I might have seen him at Ramgate Beach but knowing him like I do there had to be other contributing factors. Echo's of Mort screaming "I wasted eight years of my life on you" and "I'm the only friend you've got in the world" returned to haunt me and caused me to wonder if it might not be good old fashioned jealousy. The way he eyed the contents of my money case indicated real surprise.

I think he was pissed off that I might be pulling a good earn in the world without him because he always saw himself as the main star and bread winner of every show. I only hope if Lord what's his name ever reads these words he gets the message that people can see straight through his bullshit. I guess I should be thankful I no longer have him in my life. Now he's some crack whores problem and not mine.

Dean accumulated a sizable catalogue of photographs and interviews that documented my campabout and busking activities and they were included in a multi media presentation at a prestigious Paddington cinema. He and Brad a mate from the Cooks River Boat Club picked me and Hus up and we arrived at the cinema as the afternoon matinee crowd were having drinks around the bar. As we were entering the building Dean stopped to chat with some people he knew and his contribution to the event was praised from all sides as top shelf photo journalism. I also received a number of positive comments about my involvement. As well as the photographs Dean included edits from recorded interviews we did and selected tracks from the 'Busking Years' album. When his nine and a half minute portion of the film was playing I missed most of it because I

popped out to check on Husky and get some more overpriced drinks for the lads. I arrived in the cinema as a shot of myself and Hus camping under a bridge was complimented by a recorded dialogue where I waxed philosophical about everything in general and nothing in particular. It just so happened the launch of the 'Streetwise' book by Peter Adams took place around the same time as Deans exhibition but it was not practical for me to journey to the mountains and I missed it. Young William attended the opening in my absence and I later received a report on how it went. Apparently it was a rather posh affair held at the Carrington Hotel which was attended by the Governor of New South Wales. The combination of Deans shots with those of Peter Adams represents a complete photographic record of my travels since first I resumed street performance. I am still yet to receive a CD containing the best of Deans shots but he's a busy man with a young family and I am learning to accept that these things can take time.

At one of my Sunday afternoon performances I was observing the flow of weekend beachgoers when I spied a familiar face getting out of a hired campervan. It was Don Walker the principal songwriter and keyboardist for the legendary Australian band Cold Chisel. Don and I met back in the eighties when we were both recording at EMI studios. He remembered me straight away and we exchanged pleasantries as his young daughter played with Husky. When the conversation turned to music he lent a sympathetic ear as I described the difficulty I was having finding a affordable recording studio that wasn't a smoke and booze free zone. I need to be able to relax when I am working in this type of environment and the last thing I need is a studio operator who freaks out if you fire up a joint between takes. Don and I exchanged numbers and he called me up a couple of weeks later with recommendations for a low budget studio he had heard about in Camperdown. When Don took the time to call me back it brought the feeling that all is good in the world when a famous star makes the effort to help out someone on a lower run of the music ladder.

With the holiday season underway and the real heat of summer emerging Botany Bay becomes like any other beachside mecca for fun in the sun activities. The familiar faces of the locals are vastly outnumbered by visitors to the area and my daily earnings greatly increased with the invasion. As the summer months progressed I befriended some sun bleached, young surfing instructors called Max and Rob who arrived each morning with busloads of backpackers out for a day in the surf. Whenever the Coaster pulled into the carpark my show would kick off of their days activities and throwing coins to the early morning busker became a regular part of the days fun. New years eve came around and I was of two minds weather to work my home turf or head into the city to try my luck at one of the free concert and firework events. I decided to stay in Ramsgate after contemplating the crowds and public transport shitfight I would have to face and it was the wisest decision I could have made. People I recognised as locals who had never coughed up before were throwing coins along with the tourists. Family groups and others were standing and sitting around getting into my music and I experienced the same kind of carnival atmosphere that prevailed in Kings Cross way back when. Groups of young guys were handing me cold beers as I sang and egging me on in a mood of intoxicated festivity. When the fireworks started going off down along

the beach Husky freaked out and hid behind the amplifiers. I had to encourage him out by flicking the bottle top which is his favourite game and eventually he ignored the explosions. I only had to contend with a couple of drunken idiots which means I got off lightly considering it was such a tanked up crowd. The first was some paraletic yobbo who attempted to climb on my pushbike, which was leaning on a post and connected to the amp trolley. I was able to get him off it before he toppled the whole rig and he thought it was a big joke. Moron. The second idiot was the first ever fuckwit Asian I have had to deal with in the middle of a song. He was leaning right over me within biting range of Husky screaming "Check one two" into the mike. I turned off the amp and stood up out of my easy chair so the drunk Chinaman could see our size difference and he backed away into the night muttering under his breath. Happy New Years dickhead. I pulled one hundred and seventy dollars and a swag of free beers that night, my highest ever takings since I resumed my busking career. It will be remembered as one of my better New Years outings and a valuable lesson in how to exploit your chosen home territory.

Deans friend Brad is a most likable larrikin who has been a part of the Cooks River Motor Boat Club since he was a youngster. He lives in a bus which is converted into a camper at the rear of the boatyard with a sweeping view of the river and airport runways. To celebrate his recent release from the slammer Brad decided to organise a music festival in the grounds of the boatyard and it turned out to be the best event I have attended since I left the mountains. The gig was described as 'The Bus, Boats and Bands Festival' on flyers that were sticky taped to light poles around the Botany Bay area. An outside stage was erected on the wheeled platform they use to launch boats down the ramp and this was the place I was invited to perform. A larger stage inside the clubroom was also up and running with live bands all day and into the night. Acts which ranged from country duos to theatrical spectacles were presented and kids danced among the adults as the odd dog wandered across the dancefloor looking for scraps.

Brads extensive gaggle of cronies are hard core party animals mostly from the Newtown area who have adopted the motorboat club as their favourite hangout. Many of them play in bands and I suppose this is how he was able to recruit so many acts without forking out a red cent in performance fees. We all got a voucher for a pig on the spit dinner and some free beers but at ten dollars a head entry fee for the punters someone certainly made a killing. When it came my time to perform there was hardly anybody in the boatyard as they were all inside the clubhouse line dancing. I got the sound system operator to play some recorded music until the country ho down was over and when the audience came trickling outside for a ciggie I opened with my most rocky numbers. A couple of good looking, middle aged babes started dancing right up close to the stage area and others joined in as I sang along to the MP3 backing tracks I use in my busking show. By the time I hit them with 'Better keep Rocking' there were about twenty people of all ages dancing in the boatyard between the slips. Mid song I took a moment to contemplate the perfection of my current reality. Surrounded by a fun loving crowd who were digging my songs amid a fleet of boats under repair. If heaven isn't like this then cancel my flight buddy. My dear friend and former busking partner Dennis Aubrey was scheduled after me on the bill and as greeting hugs were exchanged he invited me

to join him at the end of his set. His favourite song from my catalogue is a piece called 'None so blind' which promotes shared abundance and universal prosperity. After a brief on stage rehearsal we locked in the appropriate key then delivered the best ever version in our history of performing the song. The harmonies locked in with mathematical precision and the audience let us know that they had been treated to some top shelf, folk rock entertainment. At the bar late in the night I bumped into an ex fucking partner from the nightclub days called Sonia. I scored some coke and we had a little snort for old times sake, but she was too pissed to go any further than flirting, let alone getting down and dirty. I broke free of the revelry and snatched a couple of hours kip in the bus before the blinding sun forced me back to the party zone. Brad and the rest of the crew were still hard at it jamming with guitars and harps as bones from the pigs carcass were thrown to the festival goers hungry, growling dogs.



SHELTER FROM THE SHITSTORM

So here I am in the quiet of the small hours having just woken up in a surprisingly pleasant mood. I was left stranded this arvo after missing the last ferry to back to Palm beach and I've taken shelter in a Mantra corporation owned, five star resort apartment at Ettalong on the Central coast, for what remains of this costly but quite enjoyable evening. My most recent attempt at a mobility assisted fishing excursion went tumbling southwards today before it even got started and it was right at the point of being just another miserable, badly planned disaster when a self preservation instinct suddenly kicked in and saved the day. Sheltering from the rain at a bus stop I was explaining to a pint sized, halfwit female copper that I wanted to speak for myself because Joe was "No longer my carer" as I had just sacked him. As the stunted little bull dyke cop was saying "We're not a tourist service" the solution to my dilemma suddenly came shining through in a thunderous, monsoonal downpour. I was broken down in my damaged wheelchair and amid stupid interjections from my ex-care assistant I was trying to get information from the local cops about where I might find some budget accommodation or even a men's shelter in their quaint little seaside town. It suddenly dawned on me that we were discussing my problem directly opposite a big fancy resort just across the way. With a substantial accumulation in the bank I decided on a lightening quick impulse to 'Let money be no obstical' and I just left them to it as I wheeled away across a carpark towards the reception area of the large, lavish resort. Joe was still trying to justify his fucked up behaviour as the elevator doors bound for my apartment slammed shut in his face and I was suddenly freed up to enjoy a quiet evening on my short holiday adventure away from home. What an absolute 'girly man', fucked up neurotic Joe is. I've allowed him to use up more chances than many ever get and now he's just too high maintenance to spend any more time with. Because I mentioned his name to the cops on the phone when they asked my carers name he got it into his head that he was going to be charged with 'criminal neglect' for not taking more control of the situation. No mention was made of the care provider he works for so unless I told the officers who they were the cops would be none the wiser. If Joe really wanted to be free of the situation all he had to do was jump on the bus that drove off before the police arrived. I think my time with 'New agey' types like Joe are well and truly over and I need to be around warriors like those I knew in earlier times.

To be quite honest This heart attack I've just survived has scared the living shit out of me and it's reinforced the notion that I should live and enjoy every micro second as if it will be my absolute final moment in this 'life on earth' adventure I've been on. Since my coronary 'wake up call' happened I've been following the doctors orders for the most part and I've reduced my pot smoking activities to an absolute bare minimum. Now I'm treating the combustible variety more like a poison than a friend and I've also started experimenting with the manufacture of home crafted THC active, medical marijuana.

From what I researched on the google the most straight forward way to produce the extract is to throw an ounce of heads into a pot full of methylated spirits and boil it

down until the very last of the alcohol is evaporated. The final gooey product tastes like shit and you have to swill it down with a big tug of beer but it seems to do the job, so for this old sailor it's goodbye to joints and bongos forever. With the inevitability of death before me like never before I am calling in all of the snippets of knowledge and worldly wisdom I have gathered so as to plot the best course forward into whatever future the fates have in store for me. Base logic tells us that all living creatures avoid pain and pursue pleasure in their mission to survive in the world and continue their line. I've adequately produced the fruit of my loins with two beautiful daughters and I've done a pretty good job of surviving life's hazards, so the bit that most interests me now is the pursuit of pleasure. The last time I was laying in a gigantic bed in a luxury holiday apartment it was with Anne Carline at Bondi beach more than thirty years ago. I think before I get to old for it the next most logical step forward should be to reinvigorate old Mr. Happy down my pants with some kind of on line erectile treatment. Step two should be a wheelchair assisted visit down to where those colourful fairy lights are always twinkling down by the bottle shop and who knows what may come of it. Whatever transpires in the sexual arena I know it will just provide the ultimate gratification to be in the company of a good looking woman in a positive and enjoyable situation. Allow me my dreams will ya!



KEEP ON TRUCKING TILL THE NAKED LIGHT OF DAY

So much for my fanciful imaginings of holding on to my golden busking spot indefinitely. Things can often change direction completely opposite to where you had predicted they might go, so it hardly seems worth bothering to project your thoughts into the future. After the visit by the Council Inspector each performance was tainted with the apprehension that he might return and make an issue of the fact my chair was protruding a few inches onto the pavement from out of the Coles car park. It's as if his arrival signalled the beginning of the end for our Botany Bay experience because things just spiralled downwards after that. That fuck head Pat from the boarding house next door attempted a petty rip off which involved the theft of my microphone bag and a ridiculous attempt to sell them back to me. He claimed some teenagers he had shooed off days earlier had sold the stuff to a local fence who was his so called "long time pal". The low life maggot didn't put me out of business however as my music equipment backup system went into play and netted in double what that piece of shit had stung me for in about a third of the time it would have taken the idiot to think up the scam. The pathetic little rip off attempt by Pat was closely followed by a rip of one hundred and fifty bucks worth of prime heads by a local Maori scumbag who claimed to be a chef and said he would produce a batch of top shelf cookies for me. Highly intoxicated after a winning show I handed over the pot as those motherfuckers drank my Jack Danials and smoked my buds while acting like a pair of true bosom buddies, who only had my best interests at heart.

The reason I wanted the cookies is the fact I am no longer smoking pot or cigarettes on the most severe of doctors orders. A sharp pain in my right calf forced me into the local medical centre and after a series of medical examinations it was deducted that my life's indulgences have ended in a narrowing of the arteries in my lower legs. This condition I was advised could result in amputation if I continued on the path I was going. The doctor only had to tell me once and it's as if his words triggered and an act of sheer will beyond my own comprehension.

I am currently on day thirty five of my quitting mission and after thirty seven years of being a chronic smoker it's a living miracle beyond belief. I don't know if it's the Champix medication or my own body rejecting the tobacco but now the smell of ciggie smoke makes my head spin and I almost heave my guts up whenever I get too close to the fumes. Whatever the case I'm going to see it through regardless of the discomforts. The worst part is when I am singing and someone lights up within feet of where I am performing. A surgical mask goes up over the nose in an instant then a hankerchief is placed over that to ensure I don't cough in the middle of the song. If the smoker doesn't take the hint and move away I have to complete the number in an outpouring of gagged and muffled tones. In spite of the contempt I feel for those who smoke within my breathing range I know they are all victims of the money grabbing, blood sucking tobacco companies and they are hopelessly hooked on a substance that can only end in death. I chose life and now whenever I observe a person taking a deep, lung wrecking inhale of those toxic fumes it's perceived by this dedicated non smoker as the

most absurd behaviour a human being could ever possibly engage in. It would seem my quest to quit smoking might only be the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the level of personal health and well being I need to attain. After the good Doctor told this fifty two year old swag man he could be functioning at the same level of health as a forty year old my war on cholesterol gained equal billing to quitting the ciggies, along with a serious reduction in fats, salts and sugars. The new level of exercise my body will need to remain on the winning side of the street is easily taken care of because I have embraced the type of lifestyle that is physically demanding on most days from first light until I conk out exhausted at dusk. I assume there are no half measures when it comes to choosing life and I imagine there might just be a second chance for those with the fortitude not to weaken when the going gets tough. I won't pray on this but I really hope I am genetically programmed to be one of those ever so lucky, one in fifty trillion, statistical profiles.

The crunch came in Ramsgate Beach when it became a serious distraction not knowing when 'Mario' the Regulations Inspector would next appear to fuck up my day. It was affecting my performance noticeably so I made a snap decision to load up the bike and trailer and move to the next bay side suburb which is Brighton Le Sands. Husky and I did a night run in the wee small hours and it was the first time ever we pulled the complete bedroll and tarp shelter combo on the busking trolley. The fully loaded trolley also holds a zip up shoulder bag containing my butane cooker and kitchen stuff and another that holds my laptop and home entertainment gear. With an added assortment of tent poles and tarps, my fold up easy chair and a clothes back pack the strapped down load reaches chest height. Just before sun up we arrived at a mansion I had previously targeted for occupation and we were comfortably settled in before the neighbours stirred from their slumber. The mansion was locked and tightly secured but there was an outside laundry left unlocked and the power was on. Next door to the laundry a hot shower was discovered with glee so it was off with my smelly duds and time to take my first proper wash in some time.

The shows I did at the entrance to the Coles store at Brighton Le Sands were equally as profitable as the ones we did at Ramsgate Beach but it wasn't long before the law was called in on a local residents noise complaint. Brighton was the last beachside suburb with a local shopping centre which meant my only option to make money was to pull my load all the way up Bay Street to Rockdale in the hope I might do well at the entrance to the railway station. Hauling the load in the morning sun really took it out of Hus and I but we eventually made it to the top of the hill and started sniffing around for somewhere to set up camp. The spot I settled on was under the wooden steps of a rear door at the home of the Rockdale Theatre company. There was a manhole leading under the building in which I could stash my valuables and if the weather got dirty it would be no trouble to stretch a tarp over the wooden platform at the top of the stairs. As it turned out I didn't get to stay in the camping spot I had located because I was hit with a friendly offer three songs into my first Rockdale show. On one of those rare occasions where I am interrupted mid song but I am actually interested in what is being said a local character known as Benny enquired where I was staying after

observing my self and my busking rig for a short time. I told him I had a spot sorted out behind the theatre to which he instructed me to follow him. Leaving Hus to watch over my stuff I followed Benny up a side alley and we came to a stop at the rear door of a restaurant beside the roller door of a large truck. Benny unlocked the roller door and threw it skyward to reveal a carpeted and waterproof dwelling in which he said I could stay. It was a welcomed relief to have a stable base for a few weeks and our daily shows near the railway station proved more rewarding than I had expected. The morning and afternoon rush hour crowds were the most varied multicultural mix I had encountered up to that point and I really enjoyed the experience because it hinted that my songs had a universal appeal which goes beyond social or ethnic categories. I struck up a little battery charging routine with the Indian supermarket directly across the street from where I performed whereby a battery would be charging away as I flattened another to complete the day's performance.

My Albanian host Benny was rarely ever seen at the rear of the cafe he owned but after about a month of my stay in the truck he poked his head under the roller door and said there had been complaints about dog shit in the lane. He said he was in the process of getting an interim registration permit for the truck and after that was done he would drive me to the Central Coast the place I had told him I next wanted to be. A week or so passed and no permit for the truck was evident and Benny announced that a friend of his named Dumpar would be driving me North and he politely refused any suggestion of money for fuel. After a boring, day long wait Dumpar finally arrived to move the truck out of it's long time parking spot at the rear of the cafe. Cooch grass had grown high up into the wheels and axles but the battery had not lost it's charge. The engine fired up after just a couple of turns of the ignition. With my load stacked in a corner of the rear baggage area and Husky sitting at my feet in the cabin we left the Botany Bay area and headed north through huddles of peak hour traffic. Ever so gradually we left the haze of the big smoke behind us until eventually the panorama of the open road was flying by on all sides. Dumpar was an older man than myself but a cheeky little rat bag with a healthy sense of humour.

I bought us some beers at a drive in bottle department near the start of the freeway and for the duration of the run our conversation was mostly centred around past sexual conquests. The best part of travelling with Dumpar was the fact he was consciously trying to smoke less cigarettes. He fiddled with a roll your own ciggie between his fingers for most of the trip but he only lit up about four times in total. I was still in the early stages of quitting so it came as a welcomed relief not to be trapped in the cabin with a chain smoker for a long drive.

After studying my internet acquired map of the Gosford area I told Dumpar the place I wanted to be dropped off was a Coles supermarket in a place called Ivanhoe just outside of the Gosford CBD. It was dark when we arrived but I managed to sniff out a camping spot in a nature strip that ran alongside the rear of a medical centre, directly across the road from the shops. Dumpar and I bid each other a friendly farewell and he drove off back towards Sydney leaving Husky and I to commence the next leg of our busking adventure. I like to think I am on a 'Busking Tour of the Cosmos' that has officially commenced on planet earth and will continue into the infinite future as far and

as long as I can imagine new worlds in which to perform my songs. At our first show near the Ivanhoe shopping centre I didn't get half way through the opening set before a Chinese looking Centre manager interrupted my performance in a panic struck fluster. More than a little pissed off at having my show cut short by some squinty eyed old bag I described the role street performers have played throughout the ages at market squares across the globe. At seeing how downright bloody angry I was getting the centre manager retreated and I knew it was only a matter of time before her security backup or the cops arrived. I packed my rig up in record time and got the fuck out of the area before the cavalry arrived to bust my arse. The only option left available to me if I wanted to go busking was a mostly uphill ride into the centre of Gosford and all going well I might do ok in the shopping mall. Our opening show in Gosford netted me about seventy bucks for a four hour shift which is better than ok in anyone's language and it went on the increase after that. I was soon to learn however that the cops and Rangers were a hard nosed bunch and they moved me along at every chance until I was forced to abandon the CBD as a viable source of income. The coastal township of Woy Woy had long been a place of interest to me because of the many fishing opportunities it presented but another point of interest was the mega shopping complex right in the middle of town. I forked out one hundred and seventy five bucks to a couple of local, removalist rip off merchants who looked like bikers, bored shitless at their day gig. I was dropped off with my load by that pair of unsalvageable drop kicks at a waterside park just past the war memorial park where boats were moored all around the sandy bend. The first person I encountered on my arrival in Woy Woy was a likable enough fellow of around sixty called Colin who lived on a small yacht with his female pup called Jesse. The pup took an instant shine to Husky and they bounced around the waterline tirelessly as Col and I sucked on some chilled beer I had produced and we exchanged the assorted tales of our travels. Col said he was anchored near the park because he was waiting for a friend to tow him around to a slipway at Brooker Bay where he intended to fit a new outboard motor and complete all the work necessary to get the boat registered.

He said he would continue living on the yacht after he was secured in a legal mooring and the only reason he was doing it was to get the waterways authorities off his case. They had been showing increased interest in his floating camp in the previous week and his whole forward progress with the vessels registration was dependant on his mate who was three days late already. After delivering a detailed account of my time on the yacht in Port Stephens and the trouble I had with the water police I wished Colin luck with his endeavours to beat the system. He said the amiable, young maritime official he was consulting with had given him an extra weeks grace because the mate had not yet arrived to tow him to the slipway. On hearing this all I could add to the conversation was my belief that the majority of uniformed officials are two faced, lying dogs who are not worthy of the public trust. Col by this stage had drunk his fill of the free beer I provided and he returned to sipping port wine out of a time worn soft drink bottle. The bottle was topped up from a half empty cask bag at regular intervals and beside the dog it was his constant companion from morning to night. This might help to explain why only two days after I first met Col he returned from walking the pup to find his yacht along with the dinghy had been removed from their anchorage near the park. After a brief phone call at a nearby box Col's first assumption was proved correct.

The boat had been impounded by the Maritime authorities because he was past the final deadline they had allowed him. The poor, pickle brained old salt had lost track of four days while on a bender and it cost him his home along with all his most treasured personal items. Those robot, live by the book, arse wipes should have showed some professionalism and made note of the fact they were dealing with a hopeless alcoholic. Then they should have assigned an expert in the field to convene the matter of Col's boat registration and legal moorings until they were resolved.

The days and weeks passed quickly as I got established into a camping and gigging routine around Woy Woy. At my second ever piss up and chat fest with Col he swapped an old fibre glass, kid damaged dinghy for a bottle of twenty three dollar whisky. The upturned dinghy was placed just above the line of the king tide where it covered my outstretched bedroll and the butane cooker in a micro kitchen setup. A canvas tarp was thrown over the boats cracked hull and a note was left sitting under a rock on the tarp advising all that it was not abandoned. I was in a state of relative confidence that I had created the best possible form of concealed campsite as I commenced my busking shows in the town centre under some shady gums. The cluster of tall gums I performed under were located between Coles and Woolworths supermarkets less than ten minutes ride from my camp down by the water. The pedestrian traffic I had first imagined would pass by did everything exactly as I had wished for and in no time I was averaging one hundred and fifty to one eighty a day. I beat my Ramsgate Beach record of three hundred dollars by thirty five bucks just before Christmas 2009 and the townsfolk were every bit as welcoming as they had been in our best towns. At each end of the day money count feelings almost feeding frenzy'esque in intensity were visiting me like the capitalistic sensations I first experienced in Katoomba and Botany Bay. I can only imagine it's something like the boom time atmosphere they say you can smell in a gold rush town. In this particular location I knew that myself and my old pal Hus had crossed over the line of public trust which can either shower a street corner songbird with generosity or deny him a sustainable income.

In most new busking locations I can reasonably predict how we will fare by the response the passing public give to the man and dog show on offer. If I have been sitting on a park bench flicking Mr. Dick Brain the cap off a coke bottle for ten minutes and there is no public input I can generally assume it's a dud town. If however the passing public respond like they did in Woy Woy I know I have arrived on easy street. I am only half the act and I am critically aware of it. I disproved the theory about not working with children back in the eighties when young Emu scored a recording contract singing 'Once upon a Planet' and I disprove the working with animals theory with Hus every day of our shared professional career. Two weeks into performing in any place where my mutt and I are tickling the public fancy I can reasonably judge how sustainable the location is. The factors before me are. How many women between the ages of eighteen and sixty threw coins as they made an extroverted fuss of Mr. Shmoosh head? The second factor is. Did as many tattooed punters throw coins as the women folk and did roughly half of this number also comment on how good looking the dog is? As the saying goes. "All Good Things Must Come To An End" The moment in which the local Rangers interrupted my performance under the gum trees was the most graphic and definitive real life situation I could have possibly ordered from life's infinite menu of delicacies. After the

wind it up buddy body language of the obvious Head Ranger I was hit with "Is that all your shit under the dinghy at Brickwall Road? "Just a sec, before we get to that, You can't do your Rock and Roll show here it's a public walkway. I went into my standard rave about this being my only income and the persecution of the authorities was forcing me to sell drugs on the street. The Rangers fucked off amid threats of hefty fines and I had to kiss another golden spot goodbye. I pulled out my maps of the freedom trail and looked deep into the vast expanse that separates the homeless nomads of the world from the comfortable and opinionated townsfolk we have to deal with.

The discovery by the Rangers of my bedroll and cooker under the dinghy was greatly assisted by a phone call which came courtesy of some waterfront resident who has never in their life encountered a beach bum adventurer such as I. To most home dwelling, God fearing individuals who are terrified at the sound of their own farts me and Husky must appear like something out of the worst movie they ever saw in their miserable lives. The faded map I held in my hand of the endless road to adventure was tattered beyond redemption but I could still make out the national capitals from their sheer population density. It was time to start viewing my central coast excursion as a nice busking holiday out of Sydney but the real bread and butter is in the big smoke where the numbers are. Based on the theory that coastal suburbs in densely populated areas are more profitable than remote, resort style settlements I decided a relocation to the Northern Rivers from out of Sydney was going to be our next big move.



CHAPTER NINETEEN



WENT TO THE DOGS

In the time since last I made an entry the only attention my journals have had is hastily scratched out notes on scraps of paper, so as to maintain some kind of record of the unfolding highs and lows of my travels. We will have to get to the high points a little later on and in the meantime I have to commence with what could only be described as an ultimate, all time low. The sad fact is that good old Husky boy my faithful companion is no longer travelling with me. I like to imagine he is bounding along in some flowery meadow up in doggy heaven, but the truth of the matter is he is rotting in a shallow grave on the banks of the Richmond River in Lismore New South Wales, a place I will never return to.

Having paid almost six hundred bucks to cart my load north in a pantec van, I yet again set up a camp in Byron bay as the holiday season, tourist crowds were once more invading the area. It was a lovely sunny afternoon and I was going through my sets near the Woolworths store and throwing a twig for Hus when I spotted a young guy riding a long skate board at high speed up the main drag. He was wearing a three cornered pirates hat and other assorted swash buckling attire. To all he passed he was shouting out "Ahoy! There". He looked somehow familiar but he was moving at high speed and I didn't get a proper look at his face. Halfway through the next song the same young dude pulled up to a skidding stop directly in front of me and instantly I stopped singing. It was young Emu from my early busking days all grown up standing before me. We recognized each other in the same precise micro second and impulsively cracked up laughing. 'Jack' as he now likes to be known said it would be great if I could accompany him to the Mardi Grass festival in Nimbin to which I immediately agreed. I took a break from singing and we smoked some of his home grown buds to celebrate our re-connection. As part of his character cultivation for the pirate thing he must have decided that gold teeth were in order and each "Ahoy There" bought with it a dazzling

display of bright golden choppers. After we had choofed some more weed on his little pipe I got back to work with Jack singing along to all the songs of mine he knew from the old days. It blew my mind when out of the blue he said he always considered me his song writing and performance mentor. After a couple of days of goofing around in Byron Jack and I loaded my bike and trailer into his Land Rover and we drove over to Lismore to check in with his mother Francesca. Fran was living in a riverside cottage that was perched on high stilts because of the extreme floods that can occur in the area. I was shown to a fenced off pool area under the house which was the storage area for lawnmowers and the like. It was also home to swarms of nasty biting mosquitoes that were breeding in the long disused and stagnant pool. This I was told would be the best place for me to set up camp so that Hus would be out of the way of the bossy, free roaming neighbourhood dogs. I set about turning the pool area into a mozzie netted habitat which was achieved in great haste while I was being eaten alive and when it was done I could work on my grid powered laptop in relative comfort with Husky happily snapping at any mosquito's that penetrated our shelter.

The first day of the Mardi Grass celebrations kicked off in Nimbin and we all left at first light to secure a good spot to park. The town was buzzing with last minute preparations when we got there and the best place to chill out away from the mayhem of the street was the outside tables in the back yard of the 'Hemp Embassy'. All gathered were engaging in some kind of marijuana consumption and I felt the slight hint of a time warping experience as I sampled a varied mix of local strains. My initial attempts at setting up to do a show were shot down in flames before they even got started which has earned Nimbin the title of the least 'Busker Friendly' town in Australia. As I was firing up my amp and going into my routine a hail damaged, old drunken, soup bone of a woman came staggering over to me giving the same kind of switch off the music hand gesture you can expect from a cop or a ranger. She was mumbling "We're gonna have three days of this shit buddy".

I recognized the pickled up old piss tank from the times I had stayed in the township way back when and I was surprised that she still had a liver left let alone the gusts of wine fueled, hot air that she was sending my way. I said "Fuck off will you I'm trying to work" to which she fired up and started raving at such volume that I had to turn the amp up a couple of notches. I recommenced the song I had been performing when in comes a gang of about six street kids and their muscular young leader says that I should "not disrespect the elder". Now it was my turn to fire up. I turned off the music again and my vocal skills were directed at the kids and anyone else who was listening in. I had to explain that I was a respected singer/songwriter who was attempting to perform songs that were composed in that town decades ago and that she was a brain dead old fuck who was so far from being a tribal elder you could measure it in star systems. It was almost as if I had delivered a satisfactory account for my actions to the street kids and they turned and walked away. The second attempt I made to get started was met with equal opposition when some old Anzac looking cunt leaned out from the balcony of the pub and shouted out for the whole town to hear. "Oi ... You can't do it there it's too close to the war memorial". I was at least twenty meters away from the friggin thing.

NIMBIN GO AND SCREW YOURSELF YOU ARE BLACKLISTED

YOU BACKWATER SHITHOLE

It was the following evening after we returned from the Mardi Grass that the real troubles began, in the garden area at Fran's house. I was woken in the night by the sound of him whimpering somewhere among the bushes under a grove of palm trees and I went over to see what was wrong with my mobile phone flashlight in my mouth. I located him quickly expecting his lead to be tangled in the bushes but it wasn't. As I led him back to his dog blanket and switched on the overhead light I noticed that he was frothing badly at the mouth and the whimpering continued. Knowing that something was dreadfully wrong I made him as comfortable as I could and raced up the outdoor wooden staircase to call on Fran and Jack for assistance. In no time the whole household was up and local vets were being woken to consult with about the crisis. Once it was established that a cane toad was the most likely culprit advise was given to flush out his mouth and throat with the garden hose as thoroughly as possible to remove the poison. The only comfort I got from the vet was the information that dogs have been known to survive cane toad poison by this means. Hus was so freaked out by the hose in his throat that he actually bit me on two separate occasions as I tried desperately to save his life. It's a miracle that I didn't absorb any of the toxic liquid where he had punctured my skin as I hosed him out as best I could. After about ten minutes of flushing him with water Jack said "That should be enough" to which we all agreed and Hus was led soaking wet like myself to his 'doggy bed'. As I dried him down he seemed to be crying far less than he had been and I actually started feeling that we might have come through ok.

After half an hour or so of just sitting comforting him I decided it might be best for both of us to just sleep it off so I turned out the light and stretched out listening intently for any signs of discomfort or pain from him. He only gave off a couple of short whines as I lay there then it went silent for what I felt might be too long. My worst fears were confirmed when I saw him in the phone light, lifeless and obviously gone.

Fran opened the door for me as I tapped quietly at the top of the stairs. When I informed her that Hus had passed on it was all I could get out before the full tsunami of my emotions burst forth waking Jack from his slumber on the lounge room floor. I was consoled late in the night with good old fashioned hippy hugs and cuddles, herbal tea and soothing conversation. Of all the places in the world for such a terrible thing to have happened this was the best of them because I was not suddenly left alone and grieving in a remote campsite somewhere. A pot of herbal tea was put on the gas stove as statements and gestures of consolation were laid by both upon my aching heart. It was agreed by all early in the conversation that a poisonous creature killing any other creature is nature at work in it's purest form. Whatever the details of the tragedy the fact remains unchangeable, death is inevitable for every living thing and all we can do is thank our lucky stars for the time we have together. The detail that most played on my mind after Husky's passing was the fact I had removed a number of floating

toads from the pool that were promptly kicked to buggery like fully inflated footballs. It's conceivable that a creature such as this would attract the attention of large predatory birds who might swoop down and peck at the floating toad and cause it to release the poison in it's glands. I had spotted Hus sipping water out of the pool on a couple of occasions before telling him off and presenting him with his full water bowl. If there was a film of toxic fluid floating on the pool that may very well be the thing that killed him and all I can do to not feel guilty is hold on to the agreed consensus that, a poisonous creature killing any other creature is just nature at work.

I didn't want to hang around at the place where Hus had died one moment longer than I had to and preparations for the trip to the Gold Coast provided a welcomed distraction from the awful ache in the pit of my guts. Jack and I loaded the bike and trailer into the back of his four wheel drive and after big friendly hugs with Fran we headed off out of Lismore a town I never want to return to for as long as I live. I remained relatively emotionless for most of the drive towards Surfers Paradise just feeling drained and zombie like as if I was on some kind of super strong psyche ward medication. Just in passing I mentioned to Jack that I had to remember who I was prior to having Hus so I could move on and the tears started to flood forth again. That was the last time I cried out loud over my loss and all going to plan I should be back in a space of emotional neutrality before the next deluge on the banks of the Richmond river. In the darkness of the night Jack and I placed Hus in a wheelbarrow in the garden and covered him with a tarp in readiness for his burial with the morning light. The others were still sleeping as I pushed the wheelbarrow to the high banks of the river just across the way from Frans house. The only spot I found that looked like it might be out of view of the council park attendants was a vine covered cavity a little way down the slope that was littered with ancient wine casks and beer bottles discarded many moons ago by the local blacks.

The litter had remained undetected by those who's job it is to remove garbage from the park so I decided it would be the best spot to lay my old mate to rest. There was a corroded ledge of reasonably loose soil in the vine shaded cavity that appeared relatively free of tangled roots and when I started digging at it with the spade it came away quite easily. Once I had excavated a hole pretty much equal to Husky's size I wrapped his stiffened, lifeless body as tightly as I could into the tarp and hauled him down into the hole. The soil mound was then covered with leaf litter and fallen branches so as to blend in with the immediate surrounds. With a brief and teary "Farewell old pal" I pushed the wheelbarrow and spade out of the cavity and I was leaving the park at the precise moment that a council vehicle was pulling up. I watched from Frans front yard as the attendant emptied the bin then he jumped back in his car and drove off. The thing I most wanted was the knowledge that Hus would be left undisturbed in his final resting place and the fact the park attendant had not seen me leaving the cavity satisfied me that this would be the case. After my grizzly labours had concluded for the morning I hung out in the tree top level kitchen with Fran and Jack receiving more comfort and delicious vegetarian delicacies. When I said to Jack that I felt a move to the Gold Coast would be the best thing for me he was quick to offer me a lift with my bike and trailer packed into his Land Rover. He and Fran both agreed that I should be in a totally new environment in which I had never spent time with Husky. I

told them that I only intended to stay in the Gold Coast until my next pension payment then I would catch a plane to Cairns in Far North Queensland. The spot where Jack dropped me and my load off at and where we finally parted company was a riverside park that I camped at for the next week or so till pension day. Just sitting around fishing, getting stoned, drinking and thinking was a past time that soon proved counter-productive because images of old faithful kept popping into my thoughts and threatening to reignite another of the debilitating depression I thought I had started to overcome. I decided the most productive thing I could do was try to do a busking show and see if I could pull it off without collapsing in a crumpled mess on the pavement. I had once performed in the very same hour that I found out about the death of my friend Arn in the Blue mountains and this would be an even greater challenge to my emotional fortitude. Once I had settled into the routine of performing again I got away with about six ok paying shows without the possession of a permit for the area. There was a noticeable drop in cash returns for my efforts which signalled that I could expect to earn a little less than half of what I could with Husky boy around. At show number six under the big guitar at The Hard Rock Café a strapping young cop who looked like a star football player strolled my way while walking the beat and commented on the fact I had no permit. I said that I had just arrived in Surfers and the Council offices were shut because it was the weekend. He was sympathetic to my plight but he said that I had to move on because I was performing illegally. He made a point of mentioning that I was lucky it was he who had spotted me for if it had of been a Council Ranger the penalty is an on the spot fine of five hundred dollars with no exceptions. I thanked the young cop and his partner for the information and packed up my gear. In spite of whatever coins and notes had landed in the case for those six shows I was content in the knowledge they had served as valuable therapy for my moving on in the world workshop.

NEEDS INTRO

CHAPTER TWENTY

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ESCAPE TO THE TROPICAL SUN

So the Gold Coast as a busking venue was rendered completely unsustainable by the friendly hint I received from the cops and besides life was telling me it was time to do the big jump to the Northern tropics. I had no idea how much of my gear I would have to discard to get there on a commercial airliner and the final weigh in at the domestic terminal saw me sporting my most compact travelling rig ever. The baggage staff at Surfers Paradise bus depot informed me that my pushbike and the trailer had to both be dismantled and stored in boxes which made it totally impractical to take them, thus they were discarded. In case I should pass that way again I stashed them in some thick pampas grass on a sloping river bank covered by my best canvas tarps. There were hardly used mozzie nets and a brand new one man tent under the tarps as well as a portable DVD player and assorted other belongings. Now in a fit state to travel on a greyhound bus I made it to the Brisbane domestic air terminal where I was required to off load even more of my gear such as a butane cooker, a CD player and a relatively new battery. If I didn't let the stuff go I would have been charged one hundred and sixty dollars excess baggage and I worked out that it was cheaper in the long run to replace everything new when I got to Cairns.

DISPOSABLE SOCIETY MADNESS

My flight to Far North Queensland took off from Brisbane about nine o'clock in the evening which meant that I would be landing in a new city late in the night with no idea where I was going to lay my head. With this in mind I decided the best thing to do would be to knock out as many zeds as I could on the plane and stay up fishing until daylight if need be. To ensure I would be ready to snore the flight away I smoked joint after joint of the weed jack had given me just to get rid of it and I ate some as well. I left a bottle I found in transit with both arms full of refreshments. By the time I was passing through the airport barriers I was sufficiently tanked up and stoned for the trip but I made a point of staying on my best behavior so I didn't attract the attention of any security staff. I was woken by the sensation of a rapid descent and then huddled along various tunnels and barriers until I was standing in the warm tropical night waiting for a shuttle to Cairns. I jumped out at the backpacker district with all of the other travellers and finding a vacant corner in an alley behind their hostel I conked out until the light of the new day was penetrating my eyelids. When I took in the scale of my new surroundings over coffee I found my imaginings for what Cairns may have become were well short of the living reality. Back then the boat harbor was the same as you might find in any small coastal community and now it was like something out of a glossy magazine. Some of the original warves remain but they

have mostly crumbled with time and been replaced by fashionable boardwalks, home to restaurants and nightclubs.

The fleet of tourist boats that traverse back and forth from the Barrier Reef are large modern twin hulled people movers with names like 'King of the Reef' and they sit among any number of squillion dollar looking vessels. The waterfront real estate has climbed skyward in the time since last I looked out over the vast mudflats of Cairns but not so much as in Surfers Paradise. That came as something of a relief. Even so, much of the same 'tacky' tourism based commercialism is thriving at every turn and you can find yourself penniless broke in no-time if you rely on take away food as your main diet. Having relinquished my bike and trailer to make the journey North I had to replace them so I could explore the territory with greater ease. The small wheeled shopping trolley I had been lugging around since I left Brisbane was barely adequate to carry my bedroll and busking gear so I just left it stashed among some bushes and walked or caught buses everywhere I went. A stroke of good luck came on about my third day in Cairns when I found out from a public notice board where the local back yard bicycle repair man was. His name is Paul and he has a workshop just out of town with bikes and bike parts filling every square inch of his garden and driveway. The bike I settled on set me back eighty bucks but Paul put in a fair bit of time helping me to fit a front carrier holding a milk crate and convert my small, hand held shopping trolley into the early beginnings of a bike trailer. Once I was mobile and hauling my load at speed around town my makeshift trailer started to sag then the frame suddenly snapped scattering my stuff all over the pavement. With reserve funds dwindling after I forked out for the plane trip I had to make a snap decision about how I could manifest a new bike trailer for the cheapest possible price I could find. It was to come in the form of a sack trolley that was on sale for just twenty bucks at a Bunnings warehouse and a further twenty for some marine grade steel rod which formed a new axle for some golf buggy wheels I scored.

The new trailer was far sturdier than the first and now that I had my rig sorted out I was ready to start doing shows. I had no idea how much money I would earn as I set up for my first performance at the transit mall entrance to woolies in Cairns. The only shows I had done since Hus went were in Surfers and I pulled roughly half of what we used to make together, so in this new place I resolved myself to the fact I should be satisfied even if I only pulled enough for drinks after work. I was well into my first set when it became apparent that the public bench directly in front of me was the place the local blacks sit around getting pissed because the nearest surveillance camera is obscured by the fronds of a large palm. They were topping up coke bottles from a cask of red wine and getting more rowdy by the minute then all it took was a refusal to hand over a cigarette for it to turn it into a full blown punchup. The blacks having trashed the bench area with spilled wine, blood and assorted garbage suddenly twigged that the cops would be on their way so they left as a group to find another drinking spot.

This type of scene was a re-occurring event that took place at most of my transit mall shows and the reason I kept performing there was because the blacks really cough up if they like you. Even if a full breed Murray is so pissed he can hardly stand up he will still dig deep and fling a handful of coins if you tickle his anhibited fancy. The

Thursday Islanders are very generous as well especially if their kids like what they see and hear. Before long I started averaging fifty to seventy or eighty bucks at the shows and the vast majority of my earnings came from our indigenous cousins. The blacks can be the most wonderful or most horrific people you could ever want to meet and the difference is largely determined by their choices as it relates to the booze. Many of those who have opted for a dry camp reality can be seen openly frowning upon those who sit pan handling for the next drink or begging in barbecue areas for any scrap because they are too hopeless drunk to provide themselves with a meal. It's all about personal dignity in my view and those who have pickled their brains on the slops have none left to build on so they just crack open another goonie and drink it all up before it gets too hot in the stifling tropical sun. Hey Whitey ... You got some shrapnel's for me ?

On one of my scouting missions out of Cairns towards the airport I found a crab pot that looked like it had not been attended to for ages going by the look of the bleached bones that remained tied up inside it. I pulled the crab pot out of the mud and untied the rope it was attached to then I strapped the pot to the bike trailer and took it back to my camp. The pot needed a few repairs and once this was done it started snaring an average of three and four crabs a day. More often than not the mud crabs I caught were undersized or female but in among this there were also the fully mature buck male muddies that retail for as much as one hundred bucks a kilo in the swankier eating houses around town. The full sensation of being in the tropics happened for me every time I had to scramble down a new muddy embankment among the mangroves to lay the pot. The knowledge that large crocodiles frequent the area is constantly reinforced by the multilingual signs erected everywhere you look and the commercialized images you see of crocs on everything from ice cream wrappers to beach hats.

Whenever I hunted my favourite coruscation in their territory I would be scanning the immediate surrounds with meticulous precision looking for the first hint of any eyes and nostrils that might be coming my way. One day while fishing at a public boat ramp near the shipping port I was able to appreciate a croc in the wild that was a safe distance away across the river. I was just wetting a line and dreaming of the big barramundi catch that was still yet to happen when I spotted something on a mudflat clearing that looked a little too grey in color to be a washed up log. Sure enough as I stayed focused on the object people in small boats started cruising by it slowly taking snapshots until it eventually got pissed off by the attention and slid into the water.

The closest I got to any sort of Barra action was on my second night in Cairns when I discovered that there were aboriginals night fishing with handlines on the floating ramp near the dinghy hire shop. A young Murray chap was cast netting as he and two young girls attended to their handlines. They had already brought in five large bream. As we were chatting about what they had caught one of his larger handlines went spinning off into the water at top speed and the race was on to retrieve it with another line or lose it attached to what must have been a very big fish. All theories about how large the fish was were confirmed when the handline was successfully retrieved and at the end of it a barramundi more than a meter long came twitching and

fighting to the surface. He managed to get it up to about waist height before it snapped his line and went crashing back into the drink. He was really pissed off that he had lost the creature and I was truly glad I had seen it's escape taking place in real life, right before my eyes. This beats the shit out of watching it on the Saturday fishing show on telly. The big Barra catch didn't happen for me the whole time I was in North Queensland but I did have some luck with a Mangrove Jack as I lay stretched out on my bed roll near the old wharves. I was suddenly woken by a spinning line in the humid tropical night but it was much too dark to see what I had landed once I had pulled it in. Thinking it may have been a catfish I threw it in a bucket still attached to the hand line and went back to sleep. In the morning when I discovered it was a better than average sized Jack I cooked him up on my gas cooker and he made a fine breakfast indeed. The lads always used to rave about the tasty flavour of Mangrove Jacks back in Brunswick Heads but in my view having now tasted it Silver Bream is a far superior eating fish and the one I still most often choose to target. ... Yum.

One of the most welcomed aspects of the new and modernized Cairns I was exploring was the fact it can be easily viewed as a kind of 'Buskers Heaven'. There are quite literally street performers on every corner and the policy of the regional council is to issue permits free of charge to all who want them without an audition system like they have in many other places. It's as if the township is somehow the official 'End of the Busking Trail' for the East coast of Australia and that makes it a bit of a mecca for travelling minstrels and musicians like myself. While I was staying there the annual Buskers festival was taking place but I didn't bother signing up because experience has taught me it's futile for an old folk to compete with cute young girls playing violins or sword juggling maniacs lighting their farts at the top of high, wobbling stilts.

The council's planning committee whoever they are have latched onto the idea of selling the town as 'The Music City' to the tourists and there are full concert stages situated around the CBD and esplanade. These are regular host to everything from Aboriginal and Islander tribal dances and singalongs to primary school choirs and conventional rock bands. The Shire Council in the area has got it right at some levels like the emphasis they place on music and other cultural festivities for the visitors but at other levels they have got it terribly wrong. The main fuck up by the powers be that I noticed was the over policing and surveillance of the pedestrian public which has gone to well beyond 'overkill' proportions. Quite literally everywhere you look there is another pole or ceiling mounted camera scrutinizing your every move and serving as a constant source of intimidation. I have spoken with a number of international travellers who agree that they feel they are constantly being watched by the authorities and it detracts from the enjoyment of their stay considerably. In line with the Councils push for a secure metropolis it would appear that everyone from the mayor down wants to lay down the law to all who visit or reside in Cairns. The worst offenders for trying to tell the public what to do are the dickheads who clean the toilets and empty the garbage bins on the Esplanade. They have somehow got it into their pea sized brains that they are the rightful custodians and keepers of all recreation areas near the waterfront and it manifests daily in the vocal instructions they impart to those using the park. I had one such garbage bin attendant approach me while I was cooking my lunch at one of the

many barbecue areas near the lagoon. In a most hostile tone he said "get all of your shit off the barbecue other people might want to use it". I had a backpack sitting on the concrete barbecue stand from which I was about to extract some fresh shorts and a couple of other items like a baited handline and a small foam esky. I asked the garden attendant where his badge was saying that he had the authority to order people around and he instantly fired up like a sky rocket on fire cracker night. Thus indicating that I had found myself a live one to play with. With both fists clenched at his side and temple veins about to burst his reply was, ..."Oooh ... Your'e a cheeky cunt aren't you". I said ... "When I'm pissed off yes". He then said "You watch out for me dickhead I knock off at two thirty and I 'll be looking for you". By this stage the fists had become unclenched by our neanderthal bin emptier and he was pointing at me in a threatening manner. My quicker than usual reply was "You can't be too interested in keeping your job" as I pointed at the pole mounted camera that was recording his every move. It suddenly dawned on this pathetic snivelling little throwback that his behaviour was in fact being monitored and he withdrew towards the toilet block shouting "The cops will get rid of you". Just before he got to the entrance of the lagoon police office he took a sharp left towards the carpark area and vanished out of sight.

Typical

The best glimpse of 'Old world Cairns' I got to experience during my stay was a charming place called 'The Digger Street Art Collective' which was home to the most fringe inspired and underground talent I saw the whole time I was there. It was like time warping back to the old Epicenter days in Byron Bay when first I entered the central computer area of the main house. There were four stilted weatherboard houses occupied by the artists in the community and they were separated by the tall, leafy remnants of a rainforest. In the computer room I put on my best "Hey groovy young dudes I'm a groovy old dude" type of voice as I enquired if anyone knew anything about putting a web site together. In an almost synchronised and rehearsed motion dreadlock adorned heads began to turn from computer screens to me and all were wearing a common, knowing smile. Then as if I was some kind of school teacher and they my students all hands went promptly into the air. The first of them to speak was a young English traveller called Callum who told me that everyone was busy on projects at the moment but he would make time for me at a cost of four hundred dollars. All he needed to get started was one hundred and seventy bucks to register the new site and the rest he said I could pay off as I made money busking. He had seen my act and said he liked what he saw and heard. We smoked a few pipes of some Port Douglas heads I had scored then we got down to the business of transferring my album material and other works from memory sticks into his system. Callum was noticeably impressed by the amount of work I had completed and stored on the flash drives and he said that I had saved heaps of money by not leaving it for someone like him to do. Things like the

typing out of song lyrics as they would appear in an album format are time consuming and he said most pro's don't want to know about it. After about a week of web site designing workshops with our faces glued to the computer screen I had a home page that conveyed most of what I wanted to present on line. Not all of the photos that were included were my final best choice but I didn't want to push the relationship because I had scored a real bargain web site from Callum. www.trippomaticproductions.com is the name I finally settled on for the site and before Callum jumped on a plane back to England he showed me how to use the article manager program that allows me to edit the various components of the site. With his departure Callum the web site designer became my first cyber collaborator and this allowed the reality to hit home for me that the web really has made the world a smaller place. By the time I left Cairns every one of the other site designers had moved on as well and they had been replaced by other travellers in that exotic, transitory artistic stop over.

The township of Kuranda in the hinterland was always a good place to score pot back in the late seventies and then when I was in the area again in the mid eighties. I had run out of the weed I scored at Digger street some days earlier so I decided to jump on a local bus and go to Kuranda for a couple of shows. I travelled out of Cairns with just my bed roll and the busking amp in a wheelie suitcase but it started to rain as the bus climbed high into the mountains and it didn't stop the whole time I was there. I managed to get a bit of fishing done in the Barren River without getting drenched but other than that the trip was a dismal affair. I didn't manage to score but the worst aspect of the journey was the fact my valuables bag got ripped off while I was stretched out under the rear porch of a souvenir shop on the main street. Blacks. My wallet containing all my cards was gone and the high definition camera was now missing in action as well. It's a real good job I had been transferring the footage from out of the memory cards or I would have no tangible record of my travels and most importantly no record of Husky having ever existed.

All things considered Cairns in my books still qualifies as what I would call a groovy and happening place. I met more kindred souls in the time I was in the area than I did anywhere else since I left Sydney. At the most unexpected moments the buskers I had been connecting with would find themselves in the same location be it the Esplanade Lagoon, the garden shelter of a back packer hostel or the front bar of the Railway Hotel. Daytime jam sessions were often extended into the night to become parties with fire throwing, dancing girls and unending merriment for all. At one such gathering on the only stretch of sandy beach in Cairns the word went around that the group would be performing that evening at a newly opened boardwalk cafe called the Mecca Bar. The owner of the place had extended an invitation for us to play for his guests with an offer of free drinks and food for all performers and a fifty dollar fee for each. The opening was a hoot and our clan of musical gypsies kept the drink trays and the food coming till the early hours. In hindsight I was fortunate to have sat out a chilly southern winter in the mildest part of the tropical year but alas life was soon to inform me that it was time to get out of town. The Head Ranger in Cairns is an obese pig of a man who would look quite at home were he wallowing and snuffling in the mud of some

remote rainforest with all the other swine and sows. He swaggered over to where I was performing one afternoon in the transit mall and interrupted my song to inform me that he had been instructed to revoke my busking permit. I asked him politely what the reason was and he said there had been a number of complaints. After bending down at great effort and taking my permit out of the case he told me that I could question the reasons for the permit being revoked at the council office near the lagoon. He stood some distance off watching me as I packed up my stuff and he was laughing his stupid head off with one of the garbage attendants as I rode towards the council office. Once inside the council office I asked the receptionist if I could speak with whoever it was that issued permits to street performers. A short while later a young male who looked about thirty presented at the counter and ask how he could be of service. I told him that my busking permit had been confiscated by the Ranger and asked him to explain the reason why. Noticably puffed up on his authority the little squirt went on to inform me that there had been a number of complaints starting with the fact that I maintained poor personal hygiene. Initially I was stopped dead in my tracks by his statement but then anger and personal humiliation kicked in and I increased my vocal volume as I went to my own defence. Other council officers started coming out of their offices into the reception area as I described my daily showering and clothes washing routines. Then I went on to explain that my fishing gear sits in a bucket which is situated in a milk crate at the front of my pushbike. I said if there was any public complaint about unpleasant aromas it was more likely the bait I use than anything else. Junior was quick to jump in with "Oh! There were other complaints as well". By now totally pissed off with the situation and not giving a flying fuck about who was listening in I leaned across the counter and said in my most intimidating tone "Like what little man?".

Obviously feeling threatened he took a step back then ran off a list starting with my manner of dress and concluding with the lyrical content of my material and the manner in which it is presented. This was the point at which I knew the story about public complaints was a fabrication and I was the target of an internal conspiracy initiated by the very people standing on the opposite side of the counter. I showed great restraint in not uttering a single swear word as I informed them that my mode of dress is indicative of clothes worn by the counter-culture the world over and the songs I perform on the streets promote environmental sustainability and solution. My parting statement before I turned my back on that pack of bistro loitering wankers was ... "Let's see what the local media thinks about all this shall we". All of the local news broadcasters said that it was too late in the day to make the six o'clock news but at the office of channel seven they said they would film my planned 'illegal busking show' and run the story the following day. This just so happened to coincide with the last official day of the Cairns Buskers Festival and the reporters thought my story would make a fitting end to the coverage they had put together thus far. The eventual news broadcast gave a balanced view of the story that could not help to work in my favour. Passers by were interviewed to find out what they thought about my permit being taken away and all agreed it was too harsh an action on the part of the Shire Council. The lady Mayor was interviewed in defence of the council's actions and she initiated her address with the words ... "Firstly I would like to say this is not a personal hygiene issue". All things said and done the Cairns regional Council handed me my next

adventure on a silver platter as I go into the world armed with only my songs and a new 'Steve cam' in search of Australia's 'Most Busker Friendly Town'. South to Adelaide the town of my birth seems like a fitting next move as it is renowned as the original festival state. I wonder how a travelling street performer fairs in 'The City of Churches' these days, it's been more than two decades since I was there. In spite of the low points I experienced the Cairns scene was the best possible therapy I could have wished for as it relates to overcoming the loss of Husky and getting back into the flow of life in the real world. The fellow travellers I connected with and the special moments we shared served as a priceless distraction from the morbid thoughts I had been entertaining prior to Husky death. An interesting detail arose while I was in the critical early moments of trying to get over his departure from this world. It was the simple realization that I was unlucky on one hand to have lost him but on the other extremely lucky to have had him in the first place. It's a bit like the old Aboriginal woman meant when she once told me not to cry for what I didn't have but to celebrate the things I did. I had experienced unforgettable boating and road adventures with true wonder dogs not once but twice. First with Rufus and then with his great nephew Husky boy. In their company I lived through things that many only dream about, in the company of majestic creatures who were kings of the canine world. This is the final entry to this part of my journal so Bon voyage all, tight lines, spit in the eye of death and I might see you on the third stone from the sun.



FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAFT OF **'THE CAPTAINS LOG'**
WITH A FINAL FAREWELL IN THE PRESENT DAY.

A final word.

It would appear that life has afforded me the opportunity to share a parting word with you about my life and times on good old Starship earth. For those who have read both parts of my journals it's an honour to have ventured the high seas with you. In the years since I was forced out of Cairns by the shire council officials I was

able to continue living outside of the normal rental market as I maintained a mostly boating and busking lifestyle. This I see as a significant achievement due to the fact it has allowed me to remain the captain of my own ship and I have for the most part had to answer to no man. I was based in Cairns for about a year recovering from the death of Husky and in that time I put together a sturdy mountain bike and trailer rig better than the last. I moved from one waterside campsite to another trying to stay clear of the crocks and I never did get to land that illusive monster barramundi.

I teamed up with a vibrant and talented young crew of traveling buskers who were also camping around the place and it was a daily struggle for us to stay out of view of the council rangers. When the crew inevitably split up I left Cairns on a southbound train and I made stops in Townsville and Bundaberg where I stayed for a few months in each town. It was just after I left Far North Queensland that the big floods began. I was in Brisbane camping in a public reserve at New Farm when the Brisbane river broke its banks. I took shelter from the constant battering rains under the front porch of a

massage parlour just up the hill on the way to fortitude valley.

The fact I was able to travel on the trains and ferries with the bike and buggy enabled me to really explore South East Queensland and I did shows all over the place from Nambour in the hinterland to Maroochydore on the coast. Then it was on to Sandgate in the Moreton Bay area where I earned almost as much cash as I did when Husky boy was around. After Sandgate I camped with others at the Occupy Brisbane gathering right in the middle of the city.

We goofed around protesting and partying for about a month then I hired a local removalist to cart my load back to the Northern rivers. I once again set up camp in Brunswick Heads at my old spot near the lagoon and other than doing shows around the area most of my time was taken up fishing and crabbing just the way I like it. In time I scored a new boat and motor and I set off on a trip from Tweed heads to Mount Warning. As luck would have it that was to be my final boating adventure before I came down with serious back problems and had to return to Sydney. That's where I am now and I'm happy to say that my anchor has been well and truly dropped in the

golden sands of the Northern beaches. Short of winning the lottery this will be my final home before I bow out at the fall of the last curtain. It's my belief that every person who wins the sperm race is a living success story before they are even born into the world. If you are reading these my closing words then every second since my conception in the womb until this moment has been a continuation of the charmed existence I've lived, because I was able to share my hearty tales of the life I lived in the world.

Fare Thee Well.

